ADYA RANGACHARYA

Listen Janamejaya
And Other Plays



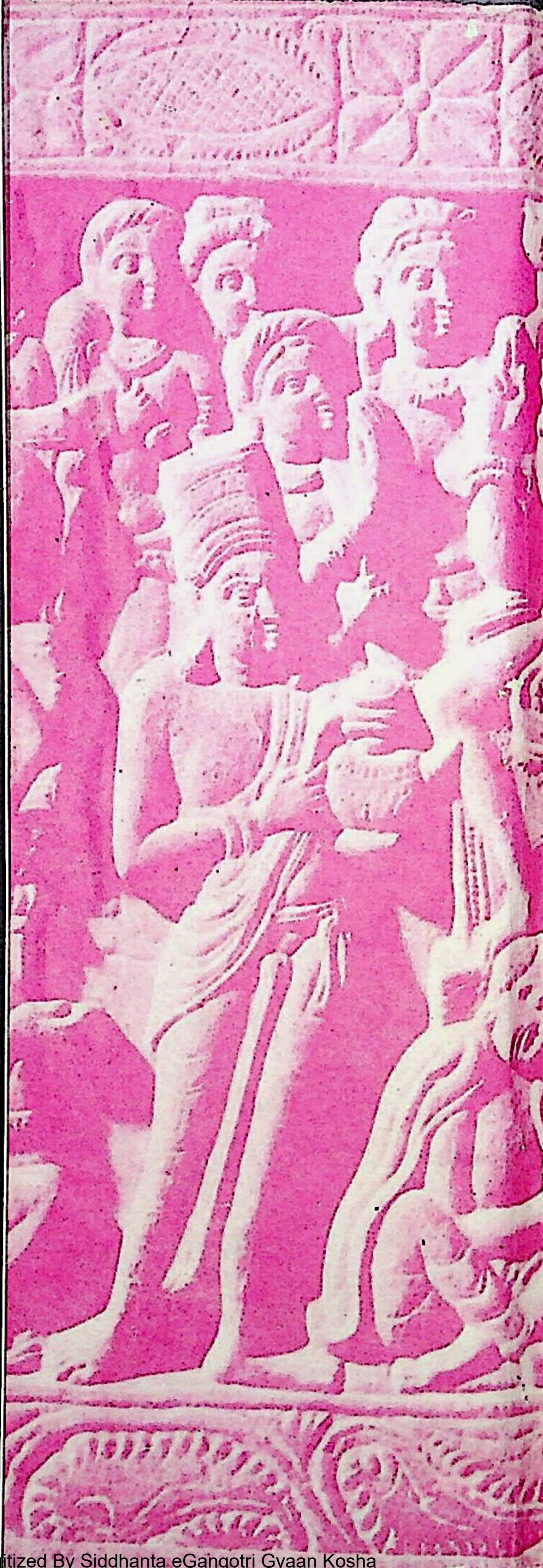
Edited by
G.S. Amur

Adya Rangacharya (1904-84), popularly known as 'Shriranga', was a prolific writer and a dedicated theatre personality. His 'Listen Janamejaya', a powerful play, has been widely acclaimed and much performed all over India. This play, as well as six other Shriranga's plays, have been put together in this volume by Prof. G.S. Amur, a leading critic and distinguished writer. The collection, 'LISTEN JANAMEJAYA AND OTHER PLAYS' includes some of Shriranga's most important plays, translated by B.C. Ramchandra Sharma, Padma Ramchandra Sharma, Usha Desai, Shashi Deshpande and K. Raghavendra Rao, as well as G.S. Amur himself.

Front cover page: A scene from *Kattale Belaku* (Darkness and Light) staged in 1989 by Kalagangotri Bangalore, directed by H.V. Venkatasubbaiah

Photo courtesy: H.V. Venkatasubbaiah

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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunkonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi

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Edited by *G.S. Amur*



Sahitya Akademi

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Dedicated to

Sharada Adya
in remembrance of her devotion to
Sriranga
the man and writer



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Introduction

Adya Rangacharya (1904-1984), more familiar to his Kannada readers as Sriranga, was one of the most prolific and versatile writers in twentieth century Karnataka. In his long literary career which began in 1920 while he was still at school and lasted till his death in 1984, there was hardly any form of literature, with the exception of poetry, on which he did not leave his permanent mark. He wrote plays and novels, biography and autobiography, criticism and philosophy, humorous and polemical essays and an enormous amount of occasional writing. In many of these fields he was a pioneer and a pathfinder.

He was the most complete man of the theatre that Karnataka, and perhaps the whole country, has produced so far. He wrote forty seven full length plays, nearly seventy one-acters and directed and acted in quite a few of them. He was an acknowledged authority on dramatic art with several books on the subject both in Kannada and English. He spearheaded the theatre movement in Karnataka and strove hard to secure for the theatre its rightful place in society. Like his great contemporary T.P. Kailasam, he started writing plays at a time when the theatre in Kannada had become slavishly derivative, depending mostly on adaptations from Sanskrit, Marathi and English, and was dominated by

commericialism, but within a span of three decades brought it to amazing maturity. If Kannada drama enjoys a national reputation today, much of the credit should go to Adya as a pioneer, though he has had illustrious successors in Girish Karnad and Chandrasekhar Kambar who have been as innovative as Adya himself and have reached even international audiences.

II

Adya's commitment to literature was great but his commitment to society was even greater. He saw his true identity as that of an intellectual, a *medhavi*. The intellectual, in Edward Said's description, 'is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosphy or opinion to as well as for a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publically to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma...'. Throughout his career as writer Adya provoked the hostility of the orthodox sections of the society, both within the theatre and outside, by questioning dogmatic positions and by raising embarrassing questions. The two books he wrote on the *Bhagavadgita, Gitagambhirya* (1941) and *Gitadarpana* (1970), available in English under the title *The Quest for Wisdom* (1993), and *Manavana Mritupatra* (The Testament of Man), completed just before his death in 1984, contain most of his seminal ideas and are absolutely essential for a full understanding of his creative work.

For all his exposure to the West, Adya was deeply rooted in the Indian classical tradition. The *Bhagavadgita* and the *Natyasastra* were the two great influences that shaped Adya's vision of man and art. His discovery of Lokamanya Tilak's *Gitarahasya* at the age of sixteen led to a lifelong quest for the true meaning of the Gita and its significance for his own times. In his first book on the *Gita, Gitagambhirya*, he formulates the fundamental problem which Arjuna faces and pre-

sents Krishna's solution to it. In Adya's analysis the crisis in Arjuna's life, as Krishna sees it, is a problem that confronts all men. Man is bound by his *Samskaras* from his very birth. In trying to free himself from them he gets caught in unnatural bonds. He possesses intellect but this does not enable him to know the why of things and he can never be sure of the distinction between good and evil. His pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of an illusion. How can this creature who lacks the strength to carry the burden of his own past, fare forward and achieve progress? If he cannot, what meaning do values like *jnana, dharma or morality* have? This in brief is Arjuna's problem. In his reply Krishna shows that this is not an insoluble problem. The bonds of men are neither real nor permanent. These have their sources in man's body, his intellect and in the social concepts and institutions that correspond to these internal sources. If man can realise the nature of his true self and see it as part of life itself he can free himself from these bonds. The eternal principle of the continuity and evolution of life is also the principle of continuity and evolution of the human being. Man can escape from his bonds and achieve freedom, *moksha*, by identifying himself with this principle and achieve progress by subordinating all his faculties to *Shraddha* in this principle.

Unlike *Gitagambhirya* which talks of first principles, *Gitadarpana* approaches Arjuna's problem from a practical angle. The central themes of the *Gita*, as Adya formulates them in this book, are; (i) The idea of progress in terms of peace and happiness in human life, (ii) the strengths and weaknesses of human institutions and organisations and (iii) the concept of leadership. Adya argues that according to the *Gita* peace and happiness are related to the *pranatattva* or *paramatma* on the one hand and on the other to the human impulses, *prakritidharma*, the need for self-protection and the drive to find food. Human impulses which come into existence in man's pursuit of his essential needs are subject to tensions caused by two contrary impulses in man, the love of freedom and the desire for restraint. There are times when these

tensions deepen into crises but these can be overcome by a Leader or *avatarapurusha*. Man's success or failure in achieving progress depends on the quality of leadership he is able to get. The *nayakatattva*, Adya argues, is the foundation of man's life on earth.

The ideas presented in the two books on the *Gita* are subjected to a final scrutiny in *Manavana Mrityupatra*. Adya now questions the very basis of the idea of progress. If by progress we mean, he argues, happiness, security and surmoun ting the obstacles created by nature and man, the human being is even less successful than animals in his pursuit of it. Adya identifies two causes for man's unhappiness--sexual desire and intellect. Institutions like marriage and family created to regulate desire and ensure the continuity of the human race are facing threats to their existence and by being used as a means of man's struggle against nature the intellect has suffered degradation. The result in Adya's view is man's total alienation from the world he lives in. Adya's early optimism which had its source in Fabian ideas imbibed during his three year stay in England from 1925 to 1928 and from Gandhian idealism which swept the country during the twenties and thirties of the last century, seems to have made way for a comparatively pessimistic world view in his final days.

Adya's engagement with the *Natyasastra* was as passionate and enduring as his involvement with the *Bhagavadgita*. As a student of Sanskrit literature he must have developed an early familiarity with the great classic but his serious exploration of the text begn with *Drama In Sanskrit Literature* (1947) where he devotes two full chapters to the *Natyasastra*. Adya rejects the theory of A.B. Keith and others who traced the origin of Sanskrit drama to religion and Greek influence and argues on the authority of the *Natyasastra* that it was originally a 'non–Aryan adventure'. He stresses its association with the lower castes and says that the Sutradhara of Sanskrit drama is an evolution of the Suta of ballad poetry. *His Introduction to Bharata's Natyasastra* (1966) steers clear of conflicting com-

mentaries and presents a lucid interpretation of the essentials. His approach throughout is that of a practising dramatist. He wrote a series of books in Kannada for Neenasam, the famous centre for drama headed by K.V. Subbanna, analysing in detail various aspects of the *Natyasastra* and translated the entire text in Kannada and English with notes and commentaries, a monumental effort by any standard. It is true that some of Adya's early plays were written under the direct influence of the Western theatre but he consciously tried, particularly after Independence, to extricate himself from this influence and absorb various elements of the traditional theatre. It was his strong belief that the *Natyasastra* had a very important role to play in shaping Indian theatre and drama.

III

Adya had been attracted to the theatre right from his childhood by the performances of the folk plays he had seen in his native village Agarkhed in Bijapur District but the realisation that he too could write plays came to him when he saw *Narangi Nishan*, a Marathi historical play, when he was still a student of the Srikrishna Pathashala in Bijapur. He wrote two plays, *Svarthatyaga* and *Dharmavijaya* under the influence of the Marathi plays, even before he left school. He joined the Deccan College, Pune in 1921 and during the four years he spent there he was more deeply involved in the Marathi theatre and wrote at least one play *Ide Samsara* under its spell. The two leading Marathi playwrights of the time were K.P. Khadilkar and Ram Ganesh Gadkari, Adya favoured Gadkari more than Khadilkar because of the social content of his plays and his excellent craftsmanship.

Adya went to England in 1925 and during his three years' stay there he was naturally attracted to the English theatre. Musical comedy was a fascinating discovery for him. One of the plays which gave him a great deal of joy was *No, No, Nanette*, a creation of Otto Herbach and Frank Mandel. He was a regular theatre-goer in London. He has recorded

that he saw a particular scene in Frederick Lonsdale's *The Last of Mrs Cheney* seven times and the performance of Shaw's *St. Joan* continuously for eight nights. He has said that the Western theatre made him realise that drama was a special art which did not need the support of dance and song.

Adya returned to India in December 1928 to face unemployment and frustration and the time he spent in Bombay between this date and June 1930 when he joined Karnatak College, Dharwad as a Lecturer in Sanskrit was for him a traumatic period. But the suffering and the mental anguish he underwent during these days sharpened his powers of introspection and opened his eyes to the misery around him and before he left for Dharwad he had written three more plays--*Udaravairagya, Adhikamasa* and *Mukkanna Viratapurisha*. The performance of *Udaravairagya* by the students of Karnatak College on 20th September 1930 launched him firmly on his career as a dramatist. This was a critical moment not only in Adya's life but also in the history of Kannada drama and amateur theatre.

Karnataka has always had a rich tradition in folk drama, the *bailata* and the *Yakshagana*, and the professional theatre drawing its strength from the Marathi stage was fairly active by the time T.P. Kailasam and Adya began writing their plays but literary drama did not have much to show beyond adaptations from Sanskrit, Marathi and English and a few original attemepts like the precocious *Iggappaheggadeya Vivahaprahasana* and some of the compositions of Santakavi, Mudavidu Krishnaraya and Huilgol Narayanaraya. Kailasam's *Tollu Gatti* (1922) marks the beginning of a new era. Kalasam was a genius, though largely unfulfilled, and his plays revolutionised the Kannada stage by their refreshing realism and modernity and freed it from the unrealities that possessed it. He was a talented actor and had steeped himself in the Western theatrical tradition during his fairly long stay in England. But he was a careless craftsman and many of his plays are flawed. Kailasam was undoubtedly the poineer, as Adya himself freely

acknowledged, but it was left to Adya to establish a firm dramatic tradition which has already produced dramatists of the calibre of Girish Karnad and Chandrasekhar Kambar.

Adya's initiative was not limited to the writing of a new kind of drama. He had to create his own theatre and audience. Kannada Amateurs, a theatre group which came into existence in 1933 was largely his creation. This group was active from 1933 to 1954 when Adya left Dharwad for good. When he arrived in Bangalore in 1956 after a stint at the Department of Drama and Song in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in Delhi he found that the situation was no better than what he had found in Dharwad in 1930. It was largely because of his initiative that Natyasangha, a state level organisation, was activised. K.V. Subbanna has this to say about Adya's contributiion to the theatre movement in Karnataka in the sixties: 'Sriranga came to Bangalore in the sixties and made it his home. He played an active role in organising theatre activity. He planned and carried out a number of programmes such as the monthly theatre camps for training secondary school teachers. These camps made a strong impact on the development of the amateur theatre.' Later as a Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Akademi he was quite active on the national scene as well.

IV

Adya's career as a dramatist falls into two divisions. He was himself aware of this and liked to think of his development in two phases: the first extending from *Udaravairagya* (1930) to *Shokachakra* (1957) and the second from *Kattale Belaku* (1959) onwards. The change from the first phase to the second was radical and manifested itself in several ways. The earlier plays were more literary than the later ones, depending on wit and comic irony for their effect. If social problems were the main concern in the earlier phase, it is man and his condition that occupy the dramatist's mind in the later. The form of the earlier plays was realistic while

that of the later ones was symbolic. To quote Adya himself on the subject, 'In the earlier plays I relied more on words. Now I rely more on images. My recent plays are structures of such images.' Only *Shokachakra* from among the plays of the first phase finds a place in this anthology but other plays like *Harijanwar* (1933), *Prapancha Panipattu* (1934) and *Sandhyakala* (1939) were equally successful and it is these which firmly established Adya as a dramatist of the first order.

Drawing inspiration from Western dramatists like Shaw and Ibsen, Adya perfected in *Harijanwar* the strategy of dealing with moral problems in a social context and the comic form suited to this strategy. The play created a furore in the Brahmin community of North Karnataka as much by the title of the play which meant 'Break the Sacred Thread' as well as 'Harijan Week', as by the satirical treatment of the theme of moral degradation of the Brahmin community. Adya's real interest in the play was in developing, through a community which he knew as an insider, a universal theme, namely, the split between profession and practice and its impact on the quality of moral and social leadership. The play derives its unity from Dodda Rayaru, its central character who is the main symbol of the Tartuffian contradiction between principle and behaviour. He professes Gandhian ideas of social reform in public to retain his leadership in society but totally contradicts them in his private life. The play ends in his total deflation. It is one of the most striking ironies in the play that his wife Venakka, orthodox and confined to the house, saves a Harijan boy from drowning in the gutters and affirms the triumph of human values over social and religious taboos, while the acknowledged leaders of the society including Dodda Rayaru look on and do nothing.

Prapancha Panipattu marks a definite advance in terms of Adya's social analysis. It is an expression of the author's dual vision–the disintegration of the family, an institution as old as the *Ramayana*, on the one hand and affirmation of human possibilities on the other. The theme of disintegration

is worked out through the happenings in a joint family of which Prahladarao, an old pensioner whose authority has been undermined by economic as well as psychological factors, is the nominal head. The affirmation comes through Sripati, his youngest son who overcomes the debilitating influence of colonial education and the pettiness of family quarrels and finds a new way of life in the service of the plague--stricken people of his town. The play employs a variety of comic techniques but it is essentially a serious play, almost bordering on the tragic, reminiscent of Chekhov's plays.

Sandhyakala marked the culmination of Adya's studies in a dying culture and his highest achievement in the comic form of drama. The play's concern, however, is not exclusively the decay of brahminism. As its chief image the Old Man for whom brahminism is nothing more than its outward forms and empty rituals suggests, the play is equally concerned with the possibilities of change in the social order. The old order represented by the Old Man has lost its substance and is unable to retain even its outer forms, but what is even more disturbing is the fact that the prospects for the future are equally bleak. The younger generation which is to replace the older one is represented in the play by two men, Puttu, the Old Man's son who is totally dependednt on his father but amuses himself by playing practical jokes on him, and Venkappa his friend the playwright who is frivolous and irresponsible. The theme of *Sandhyakala* has the Chekhovian ambivalence but Adya's treatment of it is more pessimistic than that of the Russian dramatist.

Like *Purushartha*, Adya's novel published in 1947, *Shoka chakra*, published in 1957 but written four years earlier, is an epitaph to the Gandhian era. Commenting on this play in his autobiography, *Sahitiya Atmajijnase* (1994) Adya writes : 'My belief in the political leaders must have been shaken by Gandhiji's murder. I have suggested this in my play *Shoka chakra*. I may have also suggested what kind of leadership the future offered through the characters of Hanmanthappa

and his friends. New leaders who had no faith in Gandhiji and who did not understand his ideas had already appeared. They had no interest other than electoral politics. Those who had followed Gandhiji between 1920 and 1936 were educated people but after the elections of 1937 their number decreased and the number of people who had the skill of winning elections rose.'

Shokachakra, Adya's response to the post Independence political developments in India, is a powerful political play. Jayaraya, its hero, is a true disciple of the Mahatma. Hanmantappa, once a follower of Jayaraya but now ambitious and scheming for power, is his adversary. He represents the new power--hungry generation of politicians. The conflict between the two provides the action of the play. Jayaraya's zeal for realising the Mahatma's dream of svarajya in his own area of influence and his Gandhian ideas of social reconstruction clash with the self–interest of Hanmantappa and his supporters and forces of violence are let loose. It is not just a coincidence that Jayaraya's house is stoned on the day of the Mahatma's assassination. Significantly, the only complex character in the play is that of Hanmantappa. He wins the political battle against Jayaraya but cannot fully savour his victory. The final scene of the play leaves him baffled and confused as Jayaraya stands morally tall even in his defeat.

The play shows a classic simplicity in its conception and execution. Structurally it has quite a few similarities with *Harijanwar*, also a Gandhian play. It was first performed by the Kannada Amateurs in Dharwad on April 27, 1952 with Adya himself in the lead role.

V

The period between 1948 and 1956 saw a number of changes in Adya's life. In 1948 he gave up his job in the Karnatak College and changed his name from R.V. Jagirdar to Adya Rangacharya to give himself a new identity. He spent five unproductive and frustrating years in the service of the

Government of India, first as O.S.D. in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and later as Producer of Drama in the Bangalore station of All India Radio. From 1956 Bangalore became his home and his long and productive association with Dharwad and the Kannada Amateurs came to an end. As a dramatist too he felt exhausted after the success of *Sandhyakala* and *Shokachakra* and was in search of new forms. In *Geleya Ninu Haleya Nanu* (1958), a recreation of Kalidasa's play *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* in modern and contemporary terms, he did break away from the past but did not quite succeed in overcoming the crisis. The real change came, as Adya himself recognised, with the writing of *Kattale Belaku* (Darkness and Light) (1959) and *Kelu Janamejaya* (Listen Janamejaya) (1960); 'The most important change in my writing has been brought about by two plays, *Kattale Belaku* and *Kelu Janamejaya*'.

Kattale Belaku is a play based on Adya's perception of the impossibility of drama in the context of a cultural situation where life as well as art has become unreal, a personal as well as a public crisis. The reasons for this crisis, the play suggests, are several–the perversity of the modern man who goes after the sensational in life and art to escape boredom, the total indifference of the theatre to the demands of true art, the blindness of the dramatist who lets life pass by unobserved and the meaninglessness of life itself which no longer presents the sharp contrast between light and darkness and is incapable of producing drama. The three acts of the play show the dramatist's rejection of mythology, history and literature as materials and models of drama.

As Adya himself has hinted, there are two stories and two levels of action in the play. The first relates to the Dramatist's decision to give up writing plays and the efforts of the Three Individuals representing the commercial theatre to make him reconsider his decision and give them a play. It is not clear from the ending of *Kattale Belaku* whether they succeed or not. The second consists of events involving a

variety of people from different walks of life. Though the two stories appear unrelated they are part of a common design. Darkness and light appear not only in the action of the play but are essential elements in its structure.

That the play dramatises such an undramatic action is its newness and triumph. It is born out of an awareness that drama in its traditional form is no longer possible and new forms have to be created. It is also an act of introspection and self-criticism on Adya's part and marks a turning point in his growth as a writer. Staged in Bombay, Delhi and other places the play won for Adya discriminating audiences outside Karnataka and made a deep impact on national drama.

Kattale Belaku with its focus on the dramatist paved the way for *Kelu Janamejaya*, written almost simultaneously. The Sutradhara--Leader axis of the play, corresponding to the Vaishampayana-Janamejaya combination of Kumaravyasa's *Bharata* from which the title is derived, is not just a frame for the rest of the action. It is the centre of the play itself. The progress of the action in the play is visualised in terms of the knowledge that the Leader, as the symbolic representative of society, seeks and gets from the Sutradhara, who represents the whole of the theatre including the dramatist and the producer. The clarification itself comes through an unfoldment of life stage--managed by the Sutradhara and presented through the imagery of a modern myth. First, human life is shown symbolically in its essential forms--Experience, Energy, Desire and Action--for which the concrete equivalents are an old man, a young man, a young woman and a common man. Each claims primacy and superiority over the other and seeks to establish itself as the sole principle of progress. The second set of images relates to contemporary social reality. All the characters now appear as the employees of Nava Samaja Nirmana Kendra, a creation of the Leader. The transactions among them are an enactment of the conflict of the elementary forces operating in society. The final set of images presents the results of the conflict. It is the common man

and the young woman who have triumphed. Death is common to all but these two have given meanings to their lives before they surrendered to it– the woman by creating new life and the man finding fulfilment through action.

Kelu Janamejaya is as much about art as it is about life. The Sutradhara, salvaged from Sanskrit drama and the Kannada folk tradition and elevated to a position he never enjoyed in the past, discards the concept of the stage as something fixed and separated from man's other activities or abstracted from the flux of human life, and says: 'all that happens is drama'. The play offers a new view of the relationship among the playwright, the audience and the society. Drama belongs to society and the individual performance to the audience. The dramatist is a prophet who performs his social role by seeking to bring light to the men of power, the leaders of society who are otherwise blind. He elevates life and has the power of transcending existential sorrow. Life is full of sadness, the Sutradhara says, but art can transform it. *Kelu Janamejaya* is Adya's answer to the challenge that confronted him in the earlier play. He realises a new form and a new vision and emerges from the gloom that surrounded him for some time. First performed by the Lalit Kala Niketan on January 7, 1961 in Bangalore the play has had an illustrious stage history.

Kelu Janamejaya brought about a resurgence of creativity in Adya and between this play and *Agnisakshi* his last he wrote twenty plays of which it has been possible to include just four in this anthology. In these plays Adya explores an amazing range of problems relating to man and his existence: death and immortality *(Amritaranga)*; search for happiness *(Dari Yavudayya Vaikunthake; Svargakke Mure Bagilu)*; the conflict of nature and refinement *(Shatayu Gatayu, Kalaya Tasmai Namaha)*; sexuality and man-woman relationship *(Idu Bhagyavidu Bhagyavayya, Nive Heliri, Agnisakshi)*; political institutions and ideas *(Samgramanthana, Uttama Prabhutva Lolalotte, Bharata Bhagya Vighata)*; and drama and the theatre *(Teliso Illa Mulugiso,*

Aparadhangala Kshmiso). Adya is continuously experimental in these plays which are a veritable treasure house of dramatic forms and techniques.

Sanjivani is one of the three plays published under the common title *Amritaranga* (1961). The play is based on the story of Yayati as told in the *Sambhavaparva* of the *Mahabharata*. Adya was attracted to this story because of the opportunity it provided for an exploration of the meaning of immortality or in the language of the play, *Sanjivani*, the knowledge of conquering death. This knowledge varies from character to character in the play, depending on his or her experience and understanding of the self. Devayani, a symbol of *Sristi* or creation makes the discovery that death is nothing but the beginning of new creation. Sharmistha, conceived as a symbol of beauty, sees the problem in a different way. In her interpretation, truth is a matter of the mind and beauty an attribute of the body. She argues that Kacha's acquisition of the knowledge of Sanjivani was ineffective because of his rejection of beauty. Yayati's suffering is the result of a basic error in his understanding of the nature of *Kama* or desire. He did not realise that it was only a means to the end and not the end itself. At the close of the play all the three characters proclaim the truth as they see it:

Devayani : Sanjivani is old age that dies but transforms itself into youth.

Sharmistha : Love, the law of life, which is born as enjoyment but grows into selflessness is Sanjivani.

Yayati : Sanjivani is the knowledge of the limitlessness of the self.

All the three pronouncements are based on dualities-youth and old age, enjoyment and withdrawal, body and the self. The play seems to suggest that immortality is the resolution of these dualities. The parallel between Adya's *Sanjivani* and Girish Karnad's *Yayati* has not escaped the attention of

critics. K.V. Rajgopal who compares the two plays says that unlike *Yayati* which is about a conflict between generations, *Sanjivani* is a timeless image of the truth of creation.

Rangabharata (1965) shows vital connections with *Kelu Janamejaya.* The Sutradhara–Leader frame of the earlier play is here replaced by the Sanjaya-Dhritarastra combination but the essential symbolism, that of a dialogue between wisdom and power remains the same. The new play, however, marks several advances. Here too the action takes place on two levels but these are fully integrated with each other and, as a result, there is greater economy and complexity in the structure. For example, Dhritarastra is the blind old king of the *Mahabharata* but he has also a modern identity as Dharteppa, the equally blind citizen. Sanjaya too has a double existence as the blind king's eye and the Sutradhara of the play. The complex symbolism is reinforced by a complexity of linguistic levels--Sanskrit, literary Kannada and its *gramya* variety which blend into each other.

Commenting on the strategy he employs in the play Adya writes: 'I have chosen five episodes from the *Mahabharata* to symbolise the five human passions--Desire *(Kama)*, Greed *(Lobha)*, Pride *(Mada)*, Error *(Moha)*, and have woven the past and the present together into a temporal unity,' The scenes from the *Mahabharata* are transformed by the subtle infusion of contemporary experience and these are followed by the dialogues between Dhritarastra- Dharteppa and Sanjaya--Sanjappa which seek to clarify the meaning of the scenes presented and raise fundamental human issues. The most brilliant scene in the play is the one where the famous *yakshaprasnas* are used for ironic illumination of the degradation of values in contemporary society.

The moral intention of the play is too clear to be missed but the importance of the statement it makes on the theatre may not be easily grasped. Sanjaya--Sanjappa makes a deliberate decision when he gives up narration and chooses drama as his medium. Since Dhritarastra--Dharteppa has no

idea of the power of this medium he has to be enlightened. This leads to a new understanding of the various aspects of the theatre including the stage and the audience. The play won national recognition when it was produced by B.V. Karanth for Kannada Bharati in Delhi in 1968.

Svargakke Mure Bagilu (Three Doors to Heaven) (1970) is a play about the mystery of language. It opens with a *sukta* from the *Rgveda* where Vagdevi, the goddess of speech, declares she is the mistress of the whole world. It ends with an affirmation of the power of the Word--'without the Word there would be no doors to heaven'. In his brief comment on the play in his autobiography Adya points out that the power of the word is double--edged: 'It can unite the people but it can also destroy them.' This insight can be traced back to *Shabdagunam Akasham*, a short play he wrote in 1966. In a note accompanying *Shabdagunam* Adya describes the play as an attempt to clarify a doubt regarding the nature of language. Does language which man has invented to meet the essential demands of living serve him mainly as an expression of in-essential mental activity? Kalidasa spoke of the unity of speech and meaning. Is that unity real or illusory?'

Svargakke Mure Bagilu has even more obvious connections with *Dari Yavudayya Vaikunthake?* The two plays ask the same question: How does one attain heaven or permanent happiness? Adya takes a close look at human history in his search for an answer to this question. The three Acts of the play correspond to three phases in the history of the evolution of human civilisation--the primitive society sustained by the Elder and the Priest, the medieval structure supported by the Wise Man and the King and the modern society with its faith in the Leader who draws his power from the people. With every change in the social structure there has been a corresponding change in the conception of the means of attaining *svarga*. First it was Sacrifice, later War and finally Democracy. But man, the creator of images, is also their destroyer and the doors to heaven, all erected by man, have

been closed. Perhaps, the play seems to suggest that one does not attain heaven at all, because the seekers of happiness are all destroyed in the end and the only survivors are a blind beggar who outlives all the cyclical *pralayas*, and a young woman. It is perhaps not without significance that the sole affirmation in the play comes through the blind beggar who literally has the last word.

There is a recurring pattern in Adya's dramatic career-of an oscillation between the problems of life and the problems of art. Often the two are present in a single play as in *Kattale Belaku*. In *Aparadhangala Kshamiso* (Forgive Us Our Sins) (1971) he returns to the world of the theatre and produces what he himself has called 'a pathetic farce'. As Adya explains in his autobiography the immediate provocation for the play was provided by the strange behaviour of some theatre groups in Bangalore who were totally ignorant of how their own native theatre had evolved but were ridiculously enthusiastic about Western theatre and Western dramatists.

Aparadhangala Kshamiso, which could also be called 'Six Characters In Search of a Play' is about the impasse in the contemporary Kannada theatre where the producer, the director, the dramatist and the actor often work at cross purposes. As a person who has functioned in practically all the roles connected with the theatre, Adya knows the inside story and tells it with relish. The main target here seems to be the Director and his new sense of authority born from a study of Western theatre and its techniques. The man who attacks is, of course, the Dramatist who has no use for theory and looks upon the Director as an exotic figure. There are also an Actor and an Actress in the play but they are a confused lot and neither the Director nor the Dramatist does anything to solve their problems. The producer has bribed those in power to get his play selected for a benefit show but he is unable, even after what seems to be an endless discussion where all types of suggestions are made and rejected, to make his Director and Dramatist agree on a text.

Aparadhangala Kshamiso is in a long line of plays dating from the days of *Purvaranga* (1931) and running through plays like *Kattale Belaku* and *Teliso Illa Mulugiso* (1965). It is an excellent piece of comedy.

VI

This anthology, conceived as a centenary tribute to Adya, includes some of his best known plays and can reasonably be considered representative of his vast dramatic output but, for practical reasons, a great deal had to be left out. The total absence of the one act plays which were highly successful and popular is bound to be felt. Only an Adya Reader, consisting of selections from his entire work, can do some justice to him. The best alternative of course would be to bring out an omnibus volume of his collected plays. Even this anthology has been made possible by the timely initiative of the Sahitya Akademi and willing cooperation of the distinguished panel of translators. As Editor I would like to express my gratitude to all of them.

Dharwad
March 2004

G.S.Amur

SHOKACHAKRA

(1957)

Translated by Ramachandra Sharma

CHARACTERS

(As they enter)

Govindappa	(46)
Rangamma	(54)
Shama	(28)
Hanmanthappa	(42)
Jayaraya	(60)
Venkanna	(36)

Ramanna, Sheenappa, Secretary and Bheemanna: Hanmanthappa's companions of more or less the same age

ACT ONE

Half past seven in the morning. It is the 15th August of 1947. What we see on the stage is the front of the inner yard of Jayaraya's house. There are four pillars in the four corners of the stage. We see a door in the centre of the wall opposite the spectators, bolsters along the wall on the left and a sloping desk (small table) against the wall on the right and a bolster behind it. On entering through the door opposite may be seen a bench along the wall. Over the frame of the door is a large portrait of the Mahatma. When the curtain rises, a group singing of 'Janagana Mana' is heard moving away from the house.

Jana-gana mangaladayaka jayahe
Bharatha Bhagyavidhatha
Jayahe jayahe jayahe
Jaya jaya jaya jayahe- Bharatha Bhagyavidhatha...
aa.. aa..

On the stage is seen a man with his elbows on the desk and chin resting on his palms, his attention on the group song outside. Age about 46. On his head is a faded Gandhi cap and he has on him a long unbuttoned white coat and inside, a vest with its top button undone. Everything is khadi. In his ear is hanging a pen parallel to the Gandhi cap. As he sits without paying attention to anything around, a woman of about 53-54 years enters from inside the house. With a large-sized vermilion mark on her forehead, she has a satvika look on her face, as if she is a childless woman who has great fondness for children. She has a neatly folded dhoti in her hands. Surprised that there was no sound around, she stops at the door.

WOMAN Ayya, there is no sound. Has everyone gone or what?

MAN *(Suddenly coming to pay attention)* No, Rangamma, No one has come till now.

RANGAMMA *(Noticing him)* Govindappa! I thought no one was here.

GOVINDAPPA The boys had come here in a group. They went away singing and I sat listening.

RANGAMMA It was the singing that brought me here too. Why did they come and why did they go away? Hadn't they come here to invite him?

GOVINDAPPA *(Smiling)* What more can one expect? They are mere boys. The President of the Congress Committee along with the Secretary and the Members will be coming along in a car to take Rayaru.

RANGAMMA Are you saying that they will be taking him in a car?

GOVINDAPPA *(In pride)* Do you have to ask? It is the country's Independence Day and Jayarayaru is one of the heroes of the Movement. Does he have to go walking to hoist the flag?

RANGAMMA Hm *(Sighs and then suddenly smiling)* May be, he doesn't know the arrangement. Not wanting to walk twice in a day, he didn't even go for his morning walk.

GOVINDAPPA So he is waiting, ready to go?

RANGAMMA *(Not having paid attention to what he said)* It doesn't matter what dhoti he wears when he goes by car.

GOVINDAPPA *(Laughing)* Don't tell me that he is thinking of wearing trousers!

RANGAMMA Oh! Come! It's enough if he wears a dhoti long enough to reach his feet. When I told him 'Look, you will be standing in front of a gathering as you talk. So, please don't have your dhoti above the knee. Wear this wide one that goes down,' he said that a man's intelligence is not below his knees and so there is no need to cover it.

GOVINDAPPA *(Guffawing)* That's the way Rayaru talks!

RANGAMMA Come on, Govindappa. Don't talk like him. 'May be, you will behave sensibly at least when we get independence,' I said

GOVINDAPPA *(Guffawing)* Ha... ha! Did you? Ha... ha!

RANGAMMA Does it matter whether I said it or not? Independence is here but there's no evidence of any good sense. Anyway I told him that I won't be there at the celebrations.

GOVINDAPPA You may have to be there, Rangammanavare. He won't go without you!

RANGAMMA Who know? He took me to the prison with him. But for this...?

GOVINDAPPA *(Interrupts)* I wasn't talking of him, Rangammanavare. I had the Congress Committee in mind. They may insist you should be there.

RANGAMMA What is there for a woman to do at this hour of the morning?

GOVINDAPPA It's our Independence Day!

RANGAMMA Ayya! Why should you and I jump about it at a meeting? *(Looking at the Mahatma's portrait)* Look, there he is. It's because of his *punya* that we got Independence. *(She folds her hands in devotion.)*

'Gandhi Maharaja Ki Jai'--a young man of 28-30 years comes out of his house shouting in a jocular manner. Though dressed in Khadi, he has on black trousers, a striped shirt and a red tie. His hair is neatly combed.

YOUNG MAN *(Laughing)* Are you doing *arathi* to Gandhi Mahatma for having driven out the *Rakshasas* and brought us freedom? Yes, Avva?

RANGAMMA Can one hope to see the *arathi* against the brightness of the face of that great soul?

YOUNG MAN *(Looking around)* Your army of monkeys hasn't still arrived. Govindappa! What's the matter?

GOVINDAPPA *(Surprised)* Who did you say has not arrived, Shamarayare?

SHAMA I asked about your Hanumanthappa's gang.

RANGAMMA Keep quiet! You find pleasure in making fun of people, don't you?

SHAMA Avva, let me have the house key if all of you are going to the meeting.

RANGAMMA Aren't you going?

SHAMA *(Laughing)* Real freedom for a man is in getting the house key.

RANGAMMA *(Laughing)* What's the use of telling that to an old woman? Tell it to the girl who will marry you *(Going inside)* Let's wait and see whether she gives you the key or the lock! *(Goes inside)*

Shama's eyes are filled with love and affection as he watches his mother go in. He heaves a sigh, sits on the bench with his hands resting on his knees and draws in a long breath after having gazed at Govindappa.

SHAMA A heroic mother and a heroic son- this is what happens when both mother and son are heroic, Govindappa

GOVINDAPPA *(Not understanding)* Ha... ha...! Ha... ha!

SHAMA Father, mother and son all the three of us went to prison for the sake of freedom at the same time. But we have no desire to go together to the celebration... Well

He gets up and walks slowly towards the bolsters opposite

GOVINDAPPA *(Hesitatingly)* Does it mean that you aren't coming to the Flag Hoisting?

SHAMA *(Murmuring) Jhenda ooncha rahe hamara (Suddenly stopping to turn around)* Hamara means ours, not yours. *(has a mischievous smile on his face)*

GOVINDAPPA Ours! Yours! Thank Heavens we have the problem no longer now that Pakistan has come into being. The country shouldn't have been partitioned as Jayarayaru says. But the important thing is that we got our freedom.

SHAMA What? Does Father also say that we got our freedom?

GOVINDAPPA What do you mean? Why, didn't we get our freedom?

SHAMA Don't say we got it. Say that we earned it. It's not like a piece of jewellery a truant school boy finds on the street. *(Smiling)* Say we earned it. Let there be some masculine pride at least in our words.

GOVINDAPPA *(Getting up)* What do I know of this politics, Shamarayare? I have complete trust in what Rayaru says and so I say what he says.

SHAMA And so, the responsibility for your stupidity is his. *(Sits resting against a bolster)*

GOVINDAPPA Let me tell you something. It happened 25 or 26 years ago. I must have passed my Secondary School examination just then. That was when Rayaru, Jayarayaru, visited our place. In those days, he was a leading advocate in the District. One had to give him a hundred rupee note if he had to leave the house for the court. He was that important! But that day, he had come to our town walking. He was to give a talk. And the police were there looking for him. At the end of his talk, the police took him away. Believe me, it was on watching the peaceful and virtuous look on his face as he was taken away, that I joined the Movement. As far as I am concerned, he is just the same now as he was that day. His words are like the Veda for me. *(Govindappa's voice chokes towards the end. Shama is surprised, watching it. Govindappa pretends to take his cap off and put it on again)*

Silence on the stage for a minute

SHAMA Then, our having moved without being caught by the police was not much of a protest then.

GOVINDAPPA How can one say such a thing? Different times demand different methods of protest. In those days it was a great thing for one to give up whatever one had and go

to prison. Nowadays, it is coming out of the prison and setting fire to people's property that is considered to be great. I was only trying to say why I place my trust in Rayaru even now. That's all.

SHAMA *(Mischievously)* In your opinion we got freedom because of the Movement launched in father's days. Am I right?

GOVINDAPPA *(Nods his head in agreement)*

SHAMA In your eyes then, our having faced the bullets was a mere subplot of your mythology. Right?

GOVINDAPPA *(Feeling hurt)* Che, che. Shamarayare... *(Jayaraya's voice comes from inside calling 'Shama')*

SHAMA *(Getting up promptly)* Coming, father! *(going inside)* Did you see how obedient I am to my elders? *(Head down in mock meekness he goes inside, looking at Govindappa stealthily)*

Govindappa watches him for a while till his gaze rests on the portrait of the Mahatma above the door for a minute or two.

GOVINDAPPA May you live for a hundred years, Mahatma. It is thanks to your merit that we have all this now. *(He bows in devotion.)*

'Govindappa'- there is a call from outside. Surprised, Govindappa looks at the portrait. Again the call and he realises that the call is from the outside, and turns

GOVINDAPPA Come in, come in, Hanmanthappa... *(Hurriedly setting the place right)*

Hanmanthappa comes in. Sweat is dripping from his face which shows his fatigue and the consequent irritation

HANMANTHAPPA *(Looking around)* Ela! They are not even here! Has no one come?

GOVINDAPPA Rayaru is ready. I will call him. Do sit down.

HANMANTHAPPA Wait, Govindappa. What sort of people are these, I ask you. I wonder whether anyone is there and

attending to the preparations. Thu, Govindappa. *(Looks at the gold watch on his wrist)* Hm, it is not eight. I will go there and come back soon. *(Going)* Tell Rayaru that I will be back with a car in ten minutes. *(Stops)* There's something I want you to do, Govindappa.

GOVINDAPPA *(Showing happiness on his face)* What's it, Hanmanthappa?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Looking outside, calls)* Shapoorkar, Shapoor...

GOVINDAPPA Is someone with you?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Laughing)* Who else but our Shapoorakar?

'Shapoorakar' comes in. He is the chauffeur. Dressed in khadi, he has a white Gandhi cap on his head and wears a striped shirt and shorts. He has a huge garland of flowers in his hands along with a bouquet and so his face is not clearly seen.

HANMANTHAPPA Can't you hold it properly and bring it in? Twenty to thirty rupees for the garland and you hold it crumpled as if it is some betel leaf from Savanoor. Give it to him. Govindappa, I will keep it here. *(Noticing that the chauffeur hasn't let go of the garland, he is angry.)* Eh, do you know that the gold–laced border is caught in your hair? *(Tugs at it forcibly and shakes his hand as it bleeds)* You, idiot!

GOVINDAPPA *(Concerned)* There is blood on your fingers!

HANMANTHAPPA *(Rubbing his hands)* It's nothing, Govindappa! We still haven't got over the habit of shedding blood in the service of our nation. *(To the chauffeur)* Let's go. Turn the car around and bring it. *(The cahuffeur goes)*

GOVINDAPPA *(Still concerned)* Let me at least put a cold bandage on your finger, Hanmanthappa. *(Shama comes in asking, 'What has happened to Hanmanthappa?')*

SHAMA *(Laughing)* What's this, Hanmanthappa? Has it come to this that you have to have a cold bandage round your head?

GOVINDAPPA No, no, it isn't like that...

HANMANTHAPPA I haven't lost my head and become a Socialist like you!

SHAMA That's one thing you don't have to worry about, Hanmanthappa. *(While this dialogue takes place, Govindappa is keeping the garland and bouquet on the bench)*

HANMANTHAPPA What's the worry you are talking about, as if I haven't enough of it in my head?

SHAMA That's the worry I am talking about, that you may lose your head, assuming you have one.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Laughing)* A worker needs hands. It doesn't matter if he has a head or not. What do you say, Govindappa?

SHAMA *(Notices the garland as he turns to Govindappa)* Hey, what's this?

GOVINDAPPA That's what made his hand bleed. I thought of a cold bandage...for him.

SHAMA *(To Hanmanthappa)* How many years old is this garland?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Not understanding him)* You mean...

SHAMA It's so huge. It should be 20 to 25 years old at least. My father gave up politics that many years ago. I wonder whether the garland he should have been given then has grown so huge by now!

HANMANTHAPPA Come off it! I expected something sensible from you.

Looking at his wrist watch) What! It's already ten to eight! *(Looking out)* Shapoorkar! *(He calls)*

SHAMA *(Laughing)* Shapoorkar? Have you given him that name?

Shapoorkar comes in.

HANMANTHAPPA *(To Shapoorkar)* Have you turned the car around? *(As the driver nods his head)* Why didn't you come in and let me know? Go, start the car. Quick! *(As Shapoorkar leaves, he turns to Shama)*. Why? Is it wrong to call him Shapoorkar?

SHAMA No, It's not that it is wrong. But it Should be chauffeur.

HANMANTHAPPA That's what the white Sahibs call him. The reason is that the tongue in that red face can't pronounce the word Shapoorkar. Get up and put on your shirt. I Will be back with the car soon. You can come along with Rayaru.

Leaves in a hurry. One can hear him calling Shapoorkar, Shapoorkar and the noise of the car starting and moving away.

SHAMA *(As if just waking up)* Good! What do you think of that fellow?

GOVINDAPPA *(Wanting to avoid saying anything in reply)* A good worker...! You are coming to the meeting, aren't you?

SHAMA I am not strong enough to face people at a meeting, Govindappa.

GOVINDAPPA *(Laughing)* Tell me another! *(As Shama turns to look at him, he laughs some more.)*

Jayaraya comes from inside the house, calling out 'Shall we go, Govindappa?' Jayaraya is about 60-63 years old. His face shows no signs of any weakness which comes with age. His eyes are shining brightly. He is dressed in Khadi and one can see both his knees when he moves, because of the dhoti he is wearing. He has on a close--collared coat and a Gandhi cap on his head. A folded upper cloth is round his neck like a muffler with its ends falling in front and back of his left shoulder. The quiet radiance on his face characterises his speech too.

JAYARAYA Let's go. *(Suddenly remembering)* I forgot my umbrella. Would you mind fetching it, Govindappa?

SHAMA *(Wanting to stop Govindappa who was rushing in with the speed of an arrow)* I don't think it is necessary. *(Meanwhile, Govindappa has disappeared inside)* They will be here to take you. We can wait for them.

JAYARAYA Why should we wait for them to come and take us? We may as well go.

SHAMA Che! Hanmanthappa was here. He told us that he is coming with a car and that we should wait till then.

JAYARAYA How silly can you be! *(Pays no attention to Shama who has turned to look at him)* Hanmantha?

A man of about 36 years comes in from outside. Dressed in a Nehru shirt and pytjamas, he has nothing on his head. The pocket on the left side of the shirt is full of pens and pencils.

THE MAN Jai Hind! *(He salutes)*

JAYARAYA Come in. What's all this for?

THE MAN *(Talking with the speed of the Ganga as it fell on Bhgeeratha's head)* Glory to Jayarayaru. On the occasion of this auspicious moment when the land attains its freedom, *Ranahalage* offers its thanks and best wishes to Jayarayaru, the people's leader.

JAYARAYA *(Smiling)* What's all this histrionics about, Venkanna?

VENKANNA *(Very politely)* I have come here in my capacity as a special reporter for *Ranahalage*, the leading national newspaper, to interview you, Sir.

JAYARAYA *(To Shama)* Shall we wait then till Hanmanthappa comes? *(Walks slowly and sits resting against a bolster)*

GOVINDAPPA *(Coming in)* Here, Rayare, the umbrella.

JAYARAYA Keep it there. *(Watching Govindappa move towards the bench, he notices the garland)* What's this? Where did it come from?

SHAMA Hanmanthappa has kept it there.

VENKANNA *(Takes out a notebook from the pocket of his pyjamas and scribbles in it with great speed)* One stepped into the place to see a garland of resplendent colours, its flowers shining like the lotus which blooms at the hour of sunrise...

JAYARAYA How crazy can one get! *(Venkanna stops writing and looks up paying no attention to him. He asks)* Where is Hanmantha?

SHAMA *(Looking at Venkanna, he asks his father)* This reporter has come here for an Interview. Why not finish it before Hanmanthappa arrives?

JAYARAYA *(Searching his pocket)* I have forgotten my glasses!

GOVINDAPPA I shall fetch them, Rayare. *(Gets up to go inside)*

JAYARAYA Look around thoroughly. Couldn't find them last night *(To Venkanna)* Sit down...

VENKANNA *(Looking at Shama)* I have come for a special interview, Sir.

SHAMA *(Smiling)* Why don't you do some plain talking? Ask me to go, I'll be gone.

JAYARAYA *(Also smiling)* How does one fill the columns of the paper with just plain talk? *(To Venkanna)* What do you say, Venkanna?

SHAMA *(To Venkanna)* Call me if you need my photo. I'll join you later. *(Goes in)*

VENKANNA *(Getting ready to take down notes, he sits on the bench and addresses Jayaraya)*. I have some questions. I hope you will answer them.

JAYARAYA Are you out of your mind, Venkanna? Our days are over. Why don't you forget us?

VENKANNA *(In a serious tone)* We hold at *Ranahalage* that the start of the Freedom Movement and the beginning of the Gandhi era are one and the same. This is the bright dawn when the blood--coloured sun's rays of Ramarajya will shine. We at *Ranahalage* believe that you are one such ray.

JAYARAYA Hm! Have you written down your questions or will you be making them up as you go along?

VENKANNA *(Feeling encouraged)* I have written them down, Sir.

JAYARAYA Go on, then! Your extempore talk has neither rhyme nor reason! *(Smiles)*

VENKANNA My first question, Rayare. How do you feel now that we have got our freedom? I mean, what is your first and spontaneous reaction?

JAYARAYA *(Surprised)* How do I feel...! I don't get you. What do you expect me to say?

VENKANNA *(Feeling slightly deflated)* I mean... Happiness, enthusiasm... A kind of elation for the goal achieved... What do you feel?

JAYARAYA *(Laughing)* Are you mad, Venkanna? What is the goal you are talking about and what is it that we have achieved?

VENKANNA *(Taken aback)* Sir, I don't understand you. Success at the end of 25-30 years of struggle, our final victory.

JAYARAYA *(Loud-thinking)* Hm... hm. Didn't I tell you in the beginning that I am an old-timer...? I fail to understand. What's this success you are talking about?

VENKANNA Victory for Gandhism... for the Mahatma's Movement. Both of them... .

JAYARAYA *(Interrupting)* The two are different, Venkanna. Gandhism and the Movement aren't one and the same. One has nothing to do with the other. (Starts getting up)

Venkanna is puzzled. There is a blank look in his eyes. Jayaraya gets up, looking at him but not seeing him

JAYARAYA *(Getting up)* The two are different. *(Gets up)* May be, in one sense they are the same. *(Pacing up and down slowly)* I don't think we know the meaning of the word freedom. What Gandhi taught us was Swarajya. Self-rule. We haven't got it yet. *(Suddenly stopping to face Venkanna)* We have got freedom, not self-rule *(Pacing again and as if talking to himself)* We haven't got self–rule. No. The change that has taken place in our heart is the opposite of what Mahatmaji said he would like to see. Swarajya is the land of Truth. We haven't got it yet. Truth means Ahimsa. Non–violence. We haven't attained it.. Hm.. *(Starts pacing again)*

VENKANNA Of course. I mean that now we have got freedom, we may attain Swarajya too. My question then *(Looking at the paper he carries)*, my second question comes to your own point, Sir. The British are gone...

JAYARAYA *(Stopping)* I know but why should we celebrate such an event? If a bandicoot goes out of the house, should we jump about in the front yard or first plug the hole?

VENKANNA He... he... he! That's a good one! *(Writing in his notebook)* 'A bandicoot in the house... Should we plug the hole?' *(Murmurs)*

JAYARAYA That's why I said that our days are over.

VENKANNA Why do you think so, Rayare? What we need now is your line of thinking. The country needs your point of view. Our paper would gladly support you. We are behind you.

JAYARAYA *(Laughs in a spirit of hopelessness)* Who needs either support or opposition at my age? Venkanna, I sometimes feel that one shouldn't give up the struggle till one's last breath... But again, seeing what's happening around, one feels like saying 'enough'.

VENKANNA Sir, I think you should once again get into active politics. *(Watching Jayaraya and staring at him)* Really, Sir, you should. Believe me, I am being honest.

JAYARAYA *(Shaking his head)* I was approximately your age when I plunged into the Gandhi Movement. There he was, the Mahatma. Watching his courage, his commitment to Truth, his honesty and his largeheartedness, I felt within myself that our entire life was trivial. I felt there was no task either here or in the hereafter as great as establishing Truth, Justice and Nonviolence in the world. I started reviewing my position when the politics of councils and reforms started. There was nothing to be gained by being a prisoner for eleven months in the year and an accused for the remaining one... May be, because I felt so or because I thought I was not fit enough

to commit myself to the Movement, I came out of it. But, thanks to the revolution which had been sown in the heart, I could not get back my interest in the family. And so, I stayed within myself. That's why I am surprised. Why did they have to draw me out today?

VENKANNA *(Getting up)* Hm... That's it, sir... Why did they draw you out? It is because they need your leadership. Absolutely! The people are creating their leadership in you, Sir. The people who have woken up at the dawn of freedom know who their leader is.

The sound of a motor car stopping outside and horn blaring. Suddenly, the shout, 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki jai.'

JAYARAYA They're here, I think.

VENKANNA *(Coming forward and bowing respectfully) Ranahalege* is grateful to you Sir, for this opportunity. Thank you, Sir. Personally I found it very instructive.

Meanwhile, Govindappa comes from inside saying, 'I have got your glasses, Rayare' and behind him Shama and then Rangamma... Rangamma stops at the door. At the same time, Hanmanthappa comes from outside along with a few party volunteers. Immediately on coming in, he tries to touch Jayaraya's feet in greeting. Jayaraya lifts him up, saying, 'What's this you are doing?' in protest. Shama draws Venkanna to one side and asks

SHAMA *(In a low voice)* Got your interview?

VENKANNA Yes. I did. But no one should know what there is in it.

SHAMA It is a secret till it is published, is it?

VENKANNA *(Conspiratorially)* I am a dead man if you see it in the columns of a newspaper.

JAYARAYA *(To Hanmanthappa)* What's this, man? Get up.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Looking around, speaks to Venkanna)* It was because Jayarayaru was there to show the way that we came

in to serve the nation. Write it down, Venkanna and quote me on it, if you so desire. If we have played any part at all in securing freedom, it is thanks to him.

VENKANNA Hear, hear!

HANMANTHAPPA *(Elated)* Govindappa, bring it here. *(Gestures towards the garland which Govindappa hands over to him.)*

JAYARAYA *(Backs out and speaks while being garlanded)* Che, what's this madness? Why should you garland me?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Disappointed)* Passing a unanimous resolution, our Committee members...

JAYARAYA *(Interrupting him)* A resolution to garland me? But, I don't want it.

As he walks away, he notices that everyone has frozen in his place, not knowing what to do and he also stops. He doesn't want the garland and Hanmanthappa isn't at peace, either. When everyone is helpless in this tense situation, Rangamma speaks from where she stands.

RANGAMMA Ayya! They are so enthusiastic about it. Why don't you let them garland you? *(Noticing that her husband is looking at her)* Leave it in the car if you don't want it.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Feeling revived)* We have brought this as our mark of respect for him. We will be happy if he were to accept it.

VENKANNA Jayarao should accept it... It is our token of respect,

HANMANTHAPPA See! The fact that Venkanna spoke in English means he has spoken from his heart.

JAYARAYA *(Laughing)* My question is how do I deserve this honour?

HANMANTHAPPA The reason is that you are our elder. *(Turning towards Rangamma)* Don't you agree with us, Rangammanavare?

VENKANNA You are perfectly... *(Noticing that Hanmanthappa is staring at him)*... right.

JAYARAYA I still don't think it is proper.

GOVINDAPPA *(In humility)* At least, Sir, to please us...

RANGAMMA *(Interrupting him, she turns to Jayarao)* Why are you delaying things and holding them back unnecessarily like this?

JAYARAYA Come here, Govindappa. Take the garland off as soon as they put it round my neck.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Holding the garland up)* Our land has got its freedom today. *(He starts once more when Venkanna, who had stood like anyone else, pretends to take down notes)* Our land has got its freedom today. I would like the whole world to know that it was Mahatmaji, whom we worship as our Father, who got us our freedom. We have fought under him as soldiers, with Truth and Nonviolence as our weapons. On this auspicious day I am offering this garland to Shri Jayaraya, who is our elder and guide., on behalf of myself, our Committee and the citizens of the town as a token of our service to the cause *(Jayaraya stands with his head bent, paying no attention)* Jayarayaru is our elder, our guide in the Congress Movement and a man who has made sacrifices for the sake of the nation. I have great pleasure in garlanding him. *(Turns to the volunteers and gestures even as he garlands Jayaraya. They all clap. Venkanna joins them. As Govindappa is planning to clap the loudest, Jayaraya puts the garland in his hands.)*

JAYARAYA Finished? Let's start then.

HANMANTHAPPA *(To the volunteers)* Go and ask Shapoorkar to turn the car around and bring it to the entrance, *(They leave)* You are coming, aren't you, Shamanna? I have brought two more cars. Rangammanavare, you must also come.

JAYARAYA *(To his wife)* Are you coming? Get going then.

RANGAMMA *(Mischievously)* Listen to him! He sits with the garland around his neck and I sit beside him. A fine procession by car indeed!

SHAMA Go on, mother. They are particular that you should go with them.

RANGAMMA *(Angrily)* You better keep quiet! *(To Hanmanthappa)* I will come to the meeting in the evening, Hanmanthappa.

HANMANTHAPPA As you wish. I will send a car for you in the evening.

JAYARAYA Let's go then, Hanmantha.

SHAMA *(As Hanmanthappa looks at him)* You go, I will come with Venkanna.

GOVINDAPPA Shall I take the garland with me to the meeting?

JAYARAYA Silly fellow, leave it there.

HANMANTHAPPA Leave it there, Govindappa. Are you coming? Come, there's space in the car.

Jayaraya and Hanmanthappa leave. Govindappa places the garland on the bench and rushes out. After a minute or two, the sound of the car and the horn is heard. The three on the stage wait till that sound dies. Rangamma walks across the stage, looks out, comes back and stands to the left of the stage and faces the audience.

RANGAMMA *(Talking to herself)* The whole thing is like a stage play.

VENKANNA You too should have gone with them, Rangammanavare.

RANGAMMA I have gone through all this in the past, Venkanna. Meetings, garlands, going to jail and shouts of 'Victory to you!' No joy left in all that now.

VENKANNA *(To Shama)* Why didn't you go? Hanmanthappa wanted you there!

SHAMA Here I am, never having been caught by the police who were paid a salary to catch people! Do you think that I will get caught by Hanmanthappa?

Walks along the stage sits hugging a bolster and stretches his legs

RANGAMMA Shouldn't you be at such meetings to take down notes, Venkanna?

VENKANNA *(Laughing)* I have finished taking down notes here itself, Rangammanavare.

Shama's mind is elsewhere while Rangamma and Venkanna are talking to each other

RANGAMMA Did he deliver a lecture here before you?

VENKANNA *(Properly placing the garland left in hurry by Govindappa)* Well... Yes. It wasn't a lecture though. Rayaru spoke his mind!

RANGAMMA That's why I was insistent he should go to the meeting. Initially he said no. But it is man's nature, you see. For how long can he sit quietly at home? He was telling me frequently that he should do something which would bring good to the town. It was enough if one good man came forward to lead the way, he kept saying. I knew that he was fed up staying at home doing nothing. He was wanting our town to become clean, boast of wide roads and have good schools. He always thought that these things could be achieved if people willed to have them. Then came the talk of the British leaving our country. I remember that day--he was excited like a schoolboy. He said that he hadn't expected to see such a day in his lifetime. He was fretting about saying that he had to do this and do that. I told him, 'Go ahead and do it. You have your people and there is respect for you here. Take the lead.' 'Don't be silly. Who will listen to us now?' he asked, telling me off. It was then that Hanmanthappa arrived. 'Why don't you go now?' I asked. What do you say, Venkanna? If one has an intense desire to do something, one has just to take the lead and do it straightaway. Don't you think so?

VENKANNA You are right. That's the correct attitude. What do you say, Shama?

SHAMA *(As if waking up just then)* What?

RANGAMMA Ayya! Sit down, Venkanna. I started lecturing myself. If you aren't going to the meeting, let me at least give you some tea. *(Gets up to go inside)*

VENKANNA *(Sitting down on the bench)* Che! Don't bother, Rangamma.

SHAMA *(Laughing loudly)* You say no but you sit down!

RANGAMMA I asked him to sit down and he did. He listens to his elders. *(Goes inside)*

SHAMA Are you going to publish this certificate too, are you, calling it an interview?

VENKANNA *(Sighing)* Hm... I don't think the signs are good for today's meeting.

SHAMA *(In a mixture of anger and suspicion)* Why?

VENKANNA I came to know what is there in Jayaraya's mind. People won't listen to him if he were to talk about it.

SHAMA You are mad to think so. People will listen and clap their hands.

VENKANNA *(Shaking his head)* You don't see it, Shama... People are in a mood of elation thinking that all work is over. And if one were to tell them that their work is ahead of them... No, I am really sorry for Jayarao.

SHAMA *(Laughing)* Enough of your sympathy! What do you think my father will talk about? He will repeat what Gandhiji had said in his time. People didn't act according to his words then. They don't have to act now 'The Lion of Karnataka roared again.' That's what you will write in the paper tomorrow.

VENKANNA Let the lion roar, Shama, I have no fear. Nor have I any doubt about Jayarao speaking from the bottom of his heart. That's what I am afraid of.

SHAMA *(As if taken aback)* What did you say?

VENKANNA I am sorry for his sincerity.

SHAMA *(Laughing)* Come on! You must be fainthearted to say it... What a pessimist you are!

VENKANNA You don't know, Shama. *(Looking around, he speaks in a whisper)* Do you know why Hanmanthappa came looking for Jayarao? I know why.

SHAMA Isn't it obvious? He wants it to be said that Hanmanthappa is a good man who pays respect to his elders.

VENKANNA *(Shaking his head)* No.

SHAMA Tell me, why did he come?

VENKANNA *(Looks around, gets up and sits close to Shama facing the audience)* It's a long story.

SHAMA *(Unable to contain his curiosity)* What are you saying, Venkanna?

VENKANNA *(Coming still closer)* Hanmanthappa was insistent that he should be the one to hoist the flag today. His opponents suggested another name. When he realised that the majority was not on his side, he scratched his head and then suggested Jayarao's name. Everyone had to keep quiet. Isn't that the reason why Hanmanthappa is the only one going around in a car supporting Jayarao? That is the secret, the inner story, my boy!

SHAMA *(Flabbergasted, he keeps quiet of a minute and then sighs)* The flag hoisting is the end of my father's leadership then.

VENKANNA Keep it to yourself. Let the news not reach his ears. Alright?

RANGAMMA *(Comes to the door with tea)*. Will you take the cups, Shama? *(Shama takes the cups from his mother, walks back slowly and keeps them down.)*

SHAMA Had I known all this, I would have said no.

RANGAMMA What are you talking about, Shama?

Venkanna bites his lips because Rangamma had heard what Shama said. Shama too takes a minute to recover himself

SHAMA Nothing, mother! Nothing! It's all Venkanna's mischief. It seems that Hanmanthappa had brought three cars, one for each one of us. I was saying that I would have stopped him had I known of his plans before.

RANGAMMA Poor fellow! Why do you go about making fun of him? Hanmanthappa is devoted to my husband and doesn't do a thing without consulting him. He stopped doing it recently because my husband wasn't showing much interest in things. But he hadn't stopped his visits. Didn't you see what a grand garland he had brought today? His face fell when my husband said no to it. Anyway, one is happy that at times like this, he remembers my husband and shows some respect. That's enough, isn't it, Venkanna? What a man does is forgotten tomorrow, if not today. But, if he has a big heart, people will remember him till the end. Isn't that true? You tell me.

VENKANNA *(Drinking up his tea)* You are right, Rangamma. The important thing is the heart.

SHAMA *(Drinking up his tea too)* You are both right. What matters is the heart.

RANGAMMA *(Feigning anger but in affection)* Stop it. Everything is a joke for you.

SHAMA *(Getting up)* Don't mistake me, mother. The heart is inside and what's inside is neither seen no known. That's why we say it's important.

Is about to pick up the cups and go when Govindappa comes in shouting 'Shamarayara, Rangamma' in great excitement. The three on the stage are surprised. Their faces show some anxiety too

VENKANNA What's this? Is it all over so soon?

SHAMA *(At the same time)* What, happened, Govindappa?

RANGAMMA Where is he? Has he come back?

GOVINDAPPA *(Breathing hard and wiping the sweat off his face, though happy)* The meeting is finished. Rayaru is coming back. He has started. But... But... You should have been there, Venkanna! Aba! What a spectacle! Shamanna, A jostling crowd of thousands of people went mad, listening to Rayaru. Went mad, believe me, Rangammanavare. Now the people are coming in a huge procession to reach him home!

Shama and Venkanna look at each other

RANGAMMA Whatever happened, all so suddenly?

SHAMA Govindappa, Why don't you relax and tell us so that we understand?

VENKANNA Yes. That's right. I will put it in the paper saying it has come from our special correspondent.

RANGAMMA *(Suspiciously)* How long was it that you went? You are now saying that the meeting is already over. Did he give his lecture, Govindappa?

GOVINDAPPA *(Now calm)* No, he didn't... I mean he did... The lecture...

VENKANNA Let it be, Govindappa. You better start at the beginning.

SHAMA That's right. Hm... You all started from here...

GOVINDAPPA Alright... We started from here. There was a huge crowd by the time we reached that place. As soon as he got down from the car, Jayarayaru walked briskly towards the flagpole. On either side of the path were the volunteers. He hoisted the flag as soon as he reached the spot. The men had built something like a stage next to the flagpole. Jayarayaru went up the stage. Hanmanthappa jumped up from behind to give his welcome speech. Before he could open his mouth, Rayaru pushed him aside gently and started speaking. The crowd stood still, watching his courage and passion. He began in a low voice saying that he didn't know why an old man like him had been invited. Having come, he would say what was in his mind, he said. The crowd of thirty thousand raised the slogans. 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai!' And 'Jayaraya Jindabad!' In one voice. It fell silent after that. Rayaru started speaking then. Abbabba! What a speech! One's life is fulfilled, we may say, on hearing such a speech. What a speech! What applause from the crowd! What enthusiasm! Even now I can hear every word of the speech and picture the scene...

The stage should be made dark so that no one on the stage is seen. Jayarao should be shown standing on an elevation on one side of the stage with light focused on his face. People's applause should punctuate the following speech of Jayaraya. The applause should come from a distance.

JAYARAYA You say Gandhi Ki Jai. The responsibility of bringing victory to him is yours. The evil in us should go. Our people should no longer be poor and their health should improve. We should develop an unselfish social sense. It is only then that Gandhi will be victorious. *(People's applause)* We say that the British made us poor. They are gone now. Does that make us prosperous? No. Why are we then celebrating? Let us stitch our own clothes... Let us ourselves educate our children. Let us ourselves keep our living areas clean. We will be saving money then and become prosperous. Are you ready for all this? *('Yes, we are!' 'Jayaraya Jindabad!')* We should lay roads, build tanks and dig canals. Are you ready for it? (People's shouts as before. We are all one. *Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai!)* We have no party and we don't want power. What we want to do is to serve the people. How many of you are ready for it? *(All of us!)* Let us vow today. The country has got its freedom. This freedom is not something that we won. But let us use the freedom that we got to gain Swarajya, real self--rule. Let us build Gandhi's kingdom. Let us resolve in his name that we will have self--rule in our town within a year. *(Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai, Vande Matharam, Jayarao Ki Jai--As slogans like these are shouted the stage should gradually get its lights back. The scene is as before. The three on the stage are staring at Govindappa, surprised. Shama is still holding the cups in his hands. Govindappa is very excited and is wiping the sweat off his face. Meanwhile, the slogans which were formerly heard at a distance are now coming nearer)*

GOVINDAPPA *(Jumping up excitedly)* The procession is here, it seems!

As he runs towards the outer door the other three stand petrified

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

Hanmanthappa's Office. About three months have passed since the events of the last Act. It is 4 p.m. Hanmanthappa is on the stage. In front of him a sloping table with writing implements and a bell on top of it. Leaning against the bolster, Hanmanthappa has placed both his feet on the desk. No cap on his head. On his face, a look of pride mixed with satisfaction. There is also a touch of superiority. He is blankly looking at his companions. The curtain has gone up as if afraid of the commotion among them. All of them are in khadi. At the moment, one of them has raised his arm and is saying to another, 'Who is it that says so? Let him come.' 'You should be ashamed,' says the other, 'Listen to him talk!' Both of them are to the right of Hanmanthapppa. There are two more sitting in front of him. One of them says, 'I told Hanmanthapa. Ask him whether I did or not', The other one is winding round his head a khadi turban, There is a bolster for all of them to lean on. The commotion goes on for a minute during which time the audience can hear not even a single word. Soon after, they all become quiet and heave sighs.

THE FIRST ONE Let him say what he wants. But let him come here and say it.

THE SECOND ONE You must have been ashamed to say such a thing. Did you understand, Ramanna? And yet, you go on speaking.

THE THIRD ONE *(To the second one)* Forget Ramanna. Ask Hanmanthappa whether I had told him before or not. Go on, ask him, Sheenappa, ask him.

SHEENAPPA *(Contemptuously)* You ask him if you want to. There he is, in front of you. Don't give me orders just because you are the Secretary.

RAMANNA Who would agree to be the Secretary if one listened to what he says? What do you say, Secretary Sir?

Their conversation stops while they look at one another. Then they all look at Hanmanthappa who is sitting without paying any attention and saying nothing. At that moment, the fourth one, having got the turban right, gets up. Hanmanthappa looks at him and speaks, removing his legs off the desk

HANMANTHAPPA Are you leaving, Bheemanna?

BHEEMANNA Is this a committee or what? So little sense!

HANMANTHAPPA *(Putting some authority into his voice)* Bheemanna, the country is now free. It means that all of us are free. Each one speaks his mind the way he wants. Some shout and that is their style. Some others raise their fists. They have finished talking. You go ahead now and speak. The committee will then consider it. *(As Bheemanna hesitates)* Sit down. Let the committee begin its deliberations.

BHEEMANNA What does one do sitting here when there is a wrestling bout going on? *(Sits down grumbling)*

HANMANTHAPPA Well, you can react to what has been said now. Do you just want to be a member of the committee but not say anything?

BHEEMANNA *(Feeling bored)* Hanmanthappa, I don't fancy this idle talk. Let me say one thing, though. If you hadn't given so much importance to that Jayaraya the municipal elections wouldn't have gone on like this.

RAMANNA *(In obvious disapproval)* Hm, let people say what they want!

HANMANTHAPPA *(Ringing the hand-held bell)* Order! Don't interrupt him. Let Bheemanna have his say. *(To Bheemanna)* What has happened now that you say that the municipal elections wouldn't have gone on like this? How can I say no if people want to vote for him? Can I hold their hands and stop them?

SECRETARY If you hadn't pushed him to the front that day, we wouldn't have even heard his name.

HANMANTHAPPA Order! Secretary, you just watch what goes on here and write it down. But don't speak

RAMANNA If you hadn't fallen on his feet and requested him, he wouldn't have stood for election.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Ringing the bell)* Order!

RAMANNA *(Getting worked up)* What is this shout of order, order? You say that everyone is free to say what he wants but as soon as he opens his mouth, you start ringing the bell!

SHEENAPPA You have finished what you wanted to say, haven't you?

RAMANNA *(Angrily)* Has he asked you to take his place now that his hands are tired ringing the bell?

HANMANTHAPPA Hold it, Sheenappa. Let us finish this business and then go home. Wait for a minute.

SHEENAPPA *(Unable to hold his anger any longer)* What do you mean by asking me to hold it, Hanmanthappa? Should I tolerate someone who says that you, the elected president of the party should be thrown out...

HANMANTHAPPA *(In a taunting tone)* Is that so, Ramanna? Do you want to step into my place? Just tell me, I will vacate it for you.

RAMANNA I haven't come here to ask for alms!

HANMANTHAPPA *(Suddenly in a tone of authority)* Then, why do you say whatever comes to your head?

RAMANNA *(Feeling insulted)* I will continue to say what I want to. Who are you to question me?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Taunting him)* Watch it! Do what you want. My name is not Hanmanthappa if I don't clamp the goonda act on you by morning!

SECRETARY *(In a pacifying tone)* Forget it, Hanmanthappa. Why does Ramanna talk in this manner? We have all done whatever was needed for ten years for the sake of freedom. And now, suddenly, this Jayaraya, on the strength of his having hoisted the flag one day, becomes a big man, gets elected in

the municipal elections and now wants to become the president! Is it any wonder that one feels a heartburn?

HANMANTHAPPA Do you think I am happy about it?

SHEENAPPA That's what I too am saying. The post of the President of the Municipality had to adorn him like a garland that had come sailing in the air...

RAMANNA *(Interrupting)* And now, it has come like a noose. That's why I am shouting about like this. Understand?

BHEEMANNA What do we do about it now?

HANMANTHAPPPA We have met here to discuss just that. I confess that I have burnt my fingers on account of this Jayaraya.

RAMANNA Say it again!

SECRETARY *(At the same time)* That's what I also said!

HANMANTHAPPA *(In a superior tone)* What a set of silly fellows you are! Tell me who pulled him up to the front. *(Gesturing with his hands)* I pulled him up like this and now, I will clench my fist to squeeze him, squeeze him and then throw him out! That's what I am saying.

SHEENAPPA *(To the others)* Didn't I tell you?

BHEEMANNA Don't forget that the President's election is to be held tomorrow evening.

HANMANTHAPPA Tomorrow evening, did you say? Doesn't matter. Tell me, how many are there in Jayaraya's party?

SECRETARY That's what is so puzzling! That gentleman has nothing like a party...

RAMANNA *(Interrupting)* But still, everyone raises his hands in his favour!

SHEENAPPA Why? Are we all dead?

HANMANTHAPPA Just a minute, Sheenappa. *(To Ramanna)* Let's suppose that everyone votes for him and that he becomes the President. What's your problem?

SECRETARY No problem indeed. We in the Congress shall all resign and go home.

HANMANTHAPPA Jayaraya is also a Congressman. Don't forget!

RAMANNA *(Impatiently)* Then, why don't you bring him here and give him your chair?

HANMANTHAPPA If I were stupid like you, he would have already been here to take my place.

SECRETARY *(Interrupting)* And rule us.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Rings the bell and continues)* He would have sat here and exposed your stupidity.

BHEEMANNA It's all behind us now. You are now the President. Just tell us what we should do, Hanmanthappa.

SHEENAPPA It looks as if one remembers that he is the President, when one gets into trouble.

RAMANNA It's a fact that he is the President, isn't it?

SHEENAPPA Then, listen to what the President says. Alright?

SECRETARY Let him speak.

HANMANTHAPPA Give me your word that you will do as I say. *(Except for Sheenappa, the other three look at one another.)*

SHEENAPPA Here, I give my word.

THE OTHERS *(As if under duress)* We promise. Go ahead and tell us.

ALL THE THREE First...

HANMANTHAPPA I will go and meet Jayaraya this evening...

RAMANNA With a garland in hand?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Ringing the bell)* Order! Order! *(Continues)* I will go to Jayaraya and tell him that I feel he should be the President.

RAMANNA What?

BHEEMANNA, SECRETARY What?

SHEENAPPA Wait for a minute, will you? He hasn't finished.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Ignoring their talk)* You should be the President, I feel. Why do we want anything like that? You are the elder of the entire place. It will be a feather in our cap, a well--deserved honour for you and a credit to the Municipality if you are the President by unanimous choice. Look here, Jayaraya, some in the party are not willing to go along with it. I fought for the acceptance of that idea till this evening, but failed in my attempt. There is only on way by which we can all save our honour. Jayaraya is one of us and so I have come, I will say.

BHEEMANNA *(Not understanding him)* What is there to tell him?

HANMANTHAPPA *(In disgust)* What a lot of senseless people you are! Shall I tell you? If you stand for election, some will put up a fight against you and that's no credit to anyone, I'll tell him. I'll ask him not to contest, did you understand? *(Ramanna bursts into laughter.)* What's the meaning of your laughter, Ramanna?

SECRETARY What if the old man doesn't listen to your words?

HANMANTHAPPA *(In anger)* If he doesn't listen, I'll tell him that even I will vote against him.

BHEEMANNA What if he still insists on standing for election?

HANMANTHAPPA I will then make sure that he doesn't get even a single vote.

RAMANNA What if he still gets elected?

HANMANTHAPPA I will see that the elections are declared null and void.

SECRETARY Even then...

HANMANTHAPPA *(Getting worked up suddenly)* I will get the Municipality suspended. I will see that he doesn't get a meal in the town.

SHEENAPPA *(As if pacifying him)* Calm down, Hanmnathappa, Why do you get worked up? Such a situation will never arise.

RAMANNA *(Calmly)* Do you understand now why I am this mad? What we have done is we have invited a devil on the road into the house! I hope you notice what is happening. He wants a Member of the Municipality to sweep the road where he lives. Ask him for a building where the members may meet and talk and he says the first thing to build should be a school. If we say that the President and the chief officer should have a car each in order to supervise the work, he says it is enough if we have a motor to sprinkle water on our roads. You know, don't you, Sheenappa, he has an argument against anything we say! He brings up Gandhi's name for everything and people promptly clap their hands. If we allow things to go slack like this, it may get to be difficult for us to walk the streets of our town with our heads held high! And, who is the one who held him up? Wasn't it our own Hanmanthappa? And now, where is Hanmanthappa who had a hard time in many of the jails breaking stones? And where is this Jayaraya who wore Khadi for fashion and made his money? Tell me, why shouldn't we burn inside?

SECRETARY Thanks, Ramanna, for having laid things bare like this. We all feel lighter, thanks to you. What do we want, Sheenappa? You yourself have seen it for ten years. We have been behind Hanmanthappa wherever he went. We now have freedom. We feel that our Hanmanthappa should now go ahead. What is wrong with it, Sheenappa? Don't you agree with us? *(Sheenappa nods his head in silence)*

BHEEMANNA What we want is that you should become the President and Ramanna should become the Chairman of the School Board.

SECRETARY *(Satisfied)* We will have then got respect for our men through our hard work.

RAMANNA I don't want anything. Listen to me. Let Bheemanna become the Vice-president, our Secretary the Chairman of the Standing Committee. As for the President's post, let Hanmanthappa continue.

SECRETARY I don't agree. I have enough on my hands here. If you insist that another member should be there, let Sheenappa become the Chairman of the Standing Committee.

SHEENAPPA The first suggestion was better...

SECRETARY You mean...

RAMANNA Hanmanthappa for the President's post...

RAMANNA And you the Chairman of the Standing Committee...

SECRETARY You better think again...

BHEEMANNA Let it be like that. Ramanna will be the Chairman of the School Board.

SECRETARY *(To Ramanna)* Didn't you suggest Bheemanna for the post of the Vice-- President?

RAMANNA *(Nodding his head in approval)* You better write down that the Committee passed the resolution.

SECRETARY *(Having written it down)* Shall I put it down that our President will be holding talks with Jayaraya?

HANMANTHAPPA It's a private arrangement, not a resolution of the meeting.

BHEEMANNA We have finished, haven't we? It's time for closing my shop but I haven't even opened it. I am going.

RAMANNA I am coming with you, Bheemanna. Wait *(Gets up)*

SECRETARY *(To Hanmanthappa)* I will call for a meeting of party members in the morning. Let's meet here itself. *(Hanmanthappa nods his head in agreement. Watching Bheemanna and Ramanna getting ready to leave)* Bheemanna, I'll be coming to your shop. I'll have to get copies of the notice made. (He leaves with them)

For a minute, Hanmanthappa and Sheenappa sit watching them leave. Then they look at each other and heave a sigh in satisfaction, feeling relaxed. After a minute

SHEENAPPA *(Unable to hold any longer what was bothering him.)* Did you see how they kept me out, Hanmanthappa?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Gesturing him to stop, he whispers)* Go and see if they have gone. *(Sheenappa goes to the door, looks this way and that, returns and gestures with his head to indicate that they have left.)* Come, let's talk now.

SHEENAPPA *(Sitting close to Hanmanthappa)* Did you see how those three rascals kept me out?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Smiling)* In or out! What power do they have that you attach so much importance?

SHEENAPPA *(Putting a little emphasis to what he said)* That's why Ramanna wanted it written down as a resolution. Am I right?

HANMANTHAPPA Come off it, you are talking as if a resolution passed previously has never been brushed aside! What is needed to pass a resolution? Some people sit together, raise their hands and a resolution is passed. The question is who is to act on it? Who has that authority? The authority is with the President, remember.

SHEENAPPA *(Slightly encouraged)* Does that mean that you have different thoughts on the matter?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Laughing)* Who would not be amused by the fact that these idiots are afraid of Jayaraya? Tell me, who is this Jayaraya after all? He used to be house-bound, talking only to those who went to see him. Did anyone know his name? *(Showing contempt, Sheenappa shakes his head to indicate no)* One fine day I went to his place, brought him to the meeting, allowed him to talk and introduced him to the public. He came to be known to a few persons. Don't you think so? He who came when I called him should go when I ask him to leave.

SHEENAPPA He should, he should.

HANMANTHAPPA Have you any doubts about it? You have seen it yourself. It is three months since that day and the old fellow hasn't been able to gather a few persons around him to build a party...

SHEENAPPA *(Showing his contempt)* Building a party is no joke. It needs a special kind of quality in one...

HANMANTHAPPA But, do our people have enough intelligence to realise it? Jayaraya delivers a lecture. A lot of people gather. Because there is cheering every time his name comes up, these fools think he is a leader? This is the charm of democracy, Sheenappa. Cheering doesn't mean votes. Getting applause is different from getting votes, you see.

SHEENAPPA *(Trying to change the topic)* It means that you have made your plan, doesn't it? *(In a low voice)* Jayaraya will not become the President. Right?

HANMANTHAPPA Sheenappa, let me tell you about another funny aspect of democracy. Let anyone or his father be the President. It doesn't matter. The one who matters is the puppeteer who holds the strings.

SHEENAPPA *(Laughing artificially)* You are right. Of course, you are right...

HANMANTHAPPA Leave that matter to me, Sheenappa. But there is one thing you have to do tonight.

SHEENAPPA *(Enthusiastically)* Tell me, Hanmanthappa, tell me.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Picks up the cap which has fallen to his side and puts it on)* Come, let's go home and have tea and something to bite. I'll tell you there.

SHEENAPPA *(Getting up)* There are the committees tomorrow.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Interrupting)* And Sheenappa's name for the President's post.

SHEENAPPA *(Shocked)* What? What did you say? Are you too making fun of me?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Thumping his back affectionately)* It's no joke, idiot! It shall be your name that will be proposed. Come, let's go home. I will tell you everything there. *(Leads the way)*

SHEENAPPA *(Pretending to be grumbling)* Seems to be Hanmanthappa's new game!

As both leave, the curtain falls

SCENE TWO

Two months have passed after the previous scene. It is January 20, 1948 to be precise. Time is about 8 in the night. A main room in Jayaraya's house is what we see when the curtain rises. Opposite the audience is a door that leads out of the room. It is in the centre of the wall and on either side of it is a large window. One can see lights at a distance through the window. On the right is a door which leads into the interior of he house. There is a curtain on the door. Only the door opposite is open. One can see a little of the railings and the stairs outside the door. There is a radio set in the centre of the wall and on either side of it, a comfortable chair. If one comes out of the interior of the house, one sees a large table on the right and chairs on either side of it. Newspaper, files and writing implements are on it. To its left a small table and an ordinary chair.

We hear music from the radio when the curtain rises. Govindappa is seen at the small table scrutinising some papers. Though Shama is there in the corner to the left of the radio, he is not noticed immediately. In a minute or two...

RANGAMMA *(Coming from inside)* It is past 8 and still he hasn't come back.

GOVINDAPPA *(Waking up as if from sleep and not grasping the situation)* What?

(Meanwhile, as the volume of the radio is reduced, they turn towards it and notice Shama)

RANGAMMA *(Surprised)* I didn't know you were at home, Shama.

SHAMA *(Inabored voice)* Hm... *(Yawns and stretches himself)*

RANGAMMA It's so late in the night and he isn't back...

GOVINDAPPA There is a meeting in connection with the market, Rangammanavare.

RANGAMMA I don't care about the market. All that I know is there is now a sour look on some faces as a result of the elections.

GOVINDAPPA *(Assuming superiority)* It isn't the elections, Rangammanavare. It all started when Rayaru was elected the President.

RANGAMMA Why shouldn't he have remained as he was before? Whatever gave him this urge after he had quietly spent some ten to twenty years at home?

GOVINDAPPA *(Proudly)* How can you talk like this, Rangammanavare? We have at least got lights in the town because Rayaru got elected. You wait! Everyone will be all praise for him once the new building is ready for the market.

RANGAMMA Who cares for what others say, Govindappa, when the person with whom one lives moves away? What sort of happiness is that? Look at this now. Sheenappa is angry with my husband because he won the election. Forget it. It seems that even Hanmanthappa who used to come here and have a happy chitchat is against him.

SHAMA Hanmanthappa too wanted to become the President.

RANGAMMA That's why I am saying that he shouldn't have got involved in this mess. Shama, why don't you take the cycle, go and see what is happening? If he is late like this, I find no joy in anything and no work gets done. Please go and see. *(She goes inside)*

GOVINDAPPA *(Making sure she has gone in)* She knows everything even though she doesn't go out of the house.

SHAMA Hm... *(Gets up and walks towards the sofa)*

GOVINDAPPA *(Looking at him, Surprised)* Did you want the radio switched on?

SHAMA *(Turns around suddenly and in a tone of anxiety)* What? What about the radio?

GOVINDAPPA I thought you switched it off because of me. *(Getting up)* My work is finished, anyway. I will go and find out why Rayaru is not back yet.

SHAMA *(Sitting on the sofa)* What is the date today?

GOVINDAPPA It's the 20th. No, it's the 21st. Wait. *(Looks at a newspaper from another table)* January 20, 1948. Yes, 20th.

SHAMA *(To himself)* It's five months since...

GOVINDAPPA *(Not understanding him)* Five months, did you say? Since what?

SHAMA *(With a false laugh on his face)* Nothing. We are five months into our freedom. Already an abortion...

GOVINDAPPA *(His face falling)* Abortion!

SHAMA *(Turns around without saying anything)*

GOVINDAPPA *(Really shocked and so breathing heavily)* Abortion!

Shama nods his head vigorously without saying anything

GOVINDAPPA Shamarayare...

('Are you there?' Venkanna's voice is heard from outside)

GOVINDAPPA *(Whispering in a hurried manner)* Shamarayare, Keep it to yourself at this moment. If Rayaru comes to know of it...

As he goes up the stairs, Venkanna comes in, saying, 'So, you are here!'

GOVINDAPPA *(In an excited tone)* Come in, come in. He is here No, I don't mean Rayaru. I am setting out to find out why he is so late. *(To Shama)* Don't worry, I will bring him here before I go home. *(He goes outside)*

VENKANNA *(Standing near the chair to the left of the radio)* Did you hear the news?

SHAMA I did. Govindappa was shocked when I told him.

VENKANNA You told Govindappa?

SHAMA I told him that there has been an abortion within five months of our freedom. I don't know what he felt but he asked me not to talk of it in Rayaru's presence.

VENKANNA That means that Jayaraya doesn't know it.

SHAMA I don't think he knows. Otherwise he would have dropped everything and come back.

VENKANNA *(Sitting on the same chair)* Hm... One tragedy after another.

SHAMA Have there been anymore details about what happened?

VENKANNA *(Walking to the table opposite, as if he was not paying any attention)* Details? Of what event? All that I know is what the radio said. When the prayer meeting was going on, some-one threw a bomb. People were scared but Gandhiji calmed them down.

SHAMA What do you make of the whole thing. Venkanna?

VENKANNA *(Suddenly turning round to stand near the chair in front of the table)* What do you expect me to say? There will be peace in the country as long as Gandhiji is alive. The incident means that there are fools in the country who do not realise it. *(Sits down on the chair)*

SHAMA No *(As Venkanna looks at him surprised)* There is a greater stupidity than that in the country. Shall I tell you what it is? It is to think that Gandhiji was in a party, in Congress.

VENKANNA *(Laughing)* You are right... It is the height of stu-pidity to think that Gandhiji was ever in the Congress. He himself was the Congress...

SHAMA *(Interrupting him)* There is nothing more foolish than to believe that. *(Gets up from the sofa)*

VENKANNA *(Surprised)* Eh, what did you say?

SHAMA *(More to himself)* That's the tragedy of my father *(To Venkanna)* My father too thinks like you do that Gandhiji is Congress...

VENKANNA *(Interrupting him)* Do you know what you are say-ing? Don't tell me that Gandhiji has joined your Socialist party.

SHAMA *(Laughs)* Ha... Ha!

VENKANNA *(His voice showing his irritation)* Don't just say ha, ha. What's the point you are making?

SHAMA *(Walking towards him)* Don't get angry. Our Socialist group is still a study circle. We don't call it a party.

VENKANNA I don't want your propaganda speech now. Where does Gandhiji stand then?

SHAMA Gandhiji is opposed to the Congress.

VENKANNA What? What did you say? Gandhiji opposed to the Congress! *(Laughs loudly)*

SHAMA *(Making his point insistently)* Gandhiji is opposed to the Congress like he is opposed to any other party. That's what I am saying. What he wants is something different from what the party does. And fools who don't know this work out their anger against the party by hurling bombs at him. *(As Venkanna gets ready to say something)* Wait, wait people like you and my father would like to see Gandhiji staying in the party out of their respect for him. You know what will happen to them? The party itself will show them the door!

VENKANNA *(Mockingly)* Is this the tragedy you were talking about?

SHAMA Yes, Yes. Ashokachakra for the ones that built the party and Shokachakra for the ones that followed Gandhi.

VENKANNA *(Getting up)* Something has gone wrong with your thinking. *(As Shama gestures to say 'Say what you want' and sits on the chair to the right of the radio, Venkanna stares at him and heaves a long sigh)* Anyway, you proved the proverb right.

SHAMA *(Smiling)* Which proverb is it that you are rolling out now?

VENKANNA I haven't made it up. It has come down from our elders The proverb is that the children of great men are small.

SHAMA Well I talked till now of your great ones...

VENKANNA *(Getting up)* You are crazy! You think you are very clever. Your cleverness is only on the surface. Deep inside,

you are crazy. *(As Shama looks up to stare at him, he walks to the front, not wanting to face him)* I know your type of cleverness. With no ideas of your own, you recite what others have said. With no philosophy of your own to guide you, you laugh at the moral life of others. Lacking courage to do things, you fill the vacuum with words. Hm, Gandhiji is different from the party, did you say? Are you saying that Jayaraya is not a disciple of Gandhiji? Is that what you mean? *(Shama shakes his head to indicate no)* Isn't Jayaraya a party man? *(Shama nods his head to indicate yes, he is)* No? Listen. *(With passion)* Jayarao...

RANGAMMA *(Comes from inside asking)* Is he here?

VENKANNA *(As if dazed)* Who? What did you say? *(As if waking up on noticing Rangamma)* Who should be coming, Rangamma?

RANGAMMA *(Coming on the stage)* Who do you think? It's my lot to wait for my husband, isn't it, after having married him?

VENKANNA Ha, ha! That's a good one. *(Murmurs to himself the words, 'after having married him...')*

RANGAMMA I thought I heard his voice...

SHAMA No, it was Venkanna. He was giving a lecture...

VENKANNA *(Laughing)* I was interviewing your good son to print the interview in our paper. *(To Shama)* Did you hear me? I said I would print all this in the paper.

SHAMA Go ahead! Don't think you are frightening me by saying it. I am sure that no one will read such things.

RANGAMMA *(Noticing that Govindappa isn't there)* Has Govindappa gone looking for my husband?

VENKANNA He will live for a hundred years! *(He goes to the door opposite and looks out. The other two look in the direction. A dim light, seen in the beginning at a distance comes near. And then Govindappa comes up the stairs with a lantern in hand and behind him Jayaraya. They come inside)*

There is a look of excitement on Jayaraya's face. Looking at the other three standing, he smiles

JAYARAYA What's this? You seem to be waiting to welcome me!

Even as he talks, he removes the upper garment from his shoulders and the cap on his head. Govindappa keeps the lantern outside and comes in quickly to take the things from Jayaraya.

RANGAMMA You come home so rarely that we want to get an eyeful of you...

JAYARAYA It is late, isn't it? Has it struck nine? Shama, turn the radio on, let's get the news.

SHAMA *(Looking at his wristwatch)* News? It's over, I think. *(Looks at Venkanna in a suggestive manner)*

VENKANNA No item of any significance, Rayare. I have just come from the office. Please go and have your dinner. I have come to hear the news from you.

RANGAMMA Venkanna is asking you to have your dinner.

JAYARAYA *(Smiling)* Yes, I got the message. Why shouldn't Venkanna join me?

VENKANNA *(Hurriedly)* Rayare, as for my dinner...

RANGAMMA *(Interrupting him)* If you have had your dinner, come and eat again. A journalist should be able to digest anything. *(She goes in)*

(The three on the stage look at one another. Govindappa is also looking at them. In a minute or two)

JAYARAYA I have a bit of news which even you won't be able to digest, Venkanna!

GOVINDAPPA *(Proudly)* Let's hear the story of Babu. Ha, Ha!

JAYARAYA Govindappa. Get me a mug of water when you come. I will wash my hands and feet outside.

GOVINDAPPA In a minute, Rayare. That story about Babu! Ha, ha! *(Goes inside)*

JAYARAYA *(Sitting down on the chair in front of the table)* It has been decided to lay the foundation stone for the market...

VENKANNA *(In an excited voice)* What? What did you say? Did the ones in Hanmanthappa's camp agree? Majority...

JAYARAYA *(Interrupting him)* Everyone agreed. The decision was unanimous. We will have the ceremony on the 31st morning....

VENKANNA *(More surprised than before)* What? In just another ten days? Who did you decide should be invited to lay the stone? How is it possible for a VIP to be here within just ten days?

JAYARAYA Wait, wait, I'll tell you everything. You have no idea who the VIP will be! *(Govindappa appears. Takes the mug of water from him and going towards the outer door)* But, even before that, something funny happened. *(Goes out and then down the stairs*

GOVINDAPPA Ha, ha... Hahaha! *(Can't hold his laughter)*

VENKANNA What is so funny, Govindappa?

GOVINDAPPA *(Restraining himself)* You should hear it from Rayaru himself. You will enjoy it only then.

JAYARAYA *(Coming in, he hands over the mug to Govindappa with his left hand and wipes his feet with his right)* What did you say? Govindappa, let me know when the food is served. *(Govindappa goes in with a smile on his face)*

VENKANNA It looks as if Govindappa is mightily pleased with your words.

JAYARAYA *(Sitting on the chair in front)* Govindappa? Yes. The world may turn against me but I will still be a big man in his eyes, Venkanna. Sit down. Don't write in the paper what I am going to tell you now. It is not for publication. It is a question of our honour. What do you say, Venkanna? Do you know what happened? *(Suddenly turning to Shama)* Did Hanmanthappa come here after I left for the meeting this afternoon?

SHAMA Sheenappa and he were both here.

JAYARAYA I see *(Looks as if he is considering the significance of that visit. Meanwhile, Venkanna sits on the chair at the back)* Hm, you asked me which VIP is coming to lay the foundation stone? There was a suggestion that some Minister or the other should be invited.

VENKANNA What was the decision at the end?

JAYARAYA We are asking Babu, the vegetable seller!

SHAMA *(Surprised)* What?

VENKANNA *(Taken aback)* Who did you say it would be?

JAYARAYA Babu, Babu of our town. *(It is total silence for a minute)*

JAYARAYA *(Laughing)* What do you think, Venkanna?

VENKANNA *(Not having expected the question)* What? What did you say? *(Smiling)* I am a spokesman of the people, Rayare. I publish their opinion. I have no opinion myself.

JAYARAYA What do you say, Shama?

SHAMA *(Surprised)* What do I think? I haven't thought about it at all.

JAYARAYA *(Looking at them)* The two of you are evading the question!

VENKANNA *(Feeling guilty)* It is not a question of evading, Rayare. There has been the news for a long time of someone big coming.

JAYARAYA *(Interrupting him)* Someone big? *(In a harsh tone)* Some-one, the size of a giant?

VENKANNA No, no! What I mean is...

JAYARAYA *(Contemptuously)* Hm... *(Heaves a sigh)* Someone big! *(Walks towards the radio with his hands at the back)* Who, who is a big man? It is over twenty five years since Mahatmaji gave us a practical lesson. It's the poor of the land, Daridra

Narayana, who is the big man. We grew up under his guidance and built the Congress as an organisation. We undertook the work of publicising his revolutionary ideas. One such worker became a Minister. Does that make him a big man? Hm! *(Shama looks meaningfully at Venkanna)* And democracy besides! We say that all are equal. But those who are not in a position to get honoured are small men. The poor are not entitled to any honour. They are unfit for it! *(Meanwhile, he has approached the chair to the right of the radio. Stops talking, turns around and lifts up his face to look at Venkanna)* Did you understand me, Venkanna? We who won our democratic freedom are now saying such things! *(In a mocking tone)* Will you note it down and print such opinions? Your paper will turn out to be so bright that it catches fire and burns!

VENKANNA But we need people who give their honest opinions, don't we?

JAYARAYA *(Slightly angry)* Yes, we need them, But why? To have them jeered by you! To have stones hurled at them! To prove that one is indeed great because one survived after even such a fatal attack! Venkanna, Venkanna, the only use of honesty in our present situation is to hold high the flag of rascality!

VENKANNA *(Stands in front of the table and with a little courage in his voice)* Rayare, tell us what happened in today's meeting. I will publish everything. Let me promise you, it is news after all and publishing it...

SHAMA *(Interrupting him)* Impotence comes in the way!

VENKANNA *(Surprised)* What? *(Looks at Shama)*

JAYARAYA *(Stares at his son and then addresses Venakanna)* True. Who gives you ads for the paper? The manhood of your paper... *(Stops to look at Shama)*

VENKANNA *(Completing the sentence)* depends upon the ads. *(Sitting on the table)* True, true... But, but... *(Not knowing what to say)* Whose fault is it?

JAYARAYA *(Sitting on the chair to the right of the radio)* Whose fault is it? My question is the same. Venkanna, I said something in today's meeting. It was a slip of the tongue, but I said that our town has no drainage. One member then said 'We shall get it from Bombay then.' Do you feel like laughing? Wait. Listen to this. I said it is not enough if we just present a Citation of Honour. Another one then said 'we shall send it by registered post!' Whose fault is it? It is not the fault of the stupid ones that they are stupid. It is the fault of the clever ones. Similarly, the bigness of a man is the big man's fault!

VENKANNA *(Smiling)* Doesn't matter. They agreed to what you said in he end.

JAYARAYA Do you think they will forget the fact that they had to agree to what I said? They will see that even I don't forget it. *(Getting up and smiling sadly)* They wanted a Minister to be invited to lay the foundation stone for the market. I asked them which of our Ministers has the experience of sitting in the market selling vegetables. I won the exchange but at the same time lost the argument.

VENKANNA You mean...

JAYARAYA They said yes not because they agreed to what I said. They said yes because they were afraid to oppose me. That's why I said they will never forget it. I know they will hate me because they had to betray their fear in the presence of others.

VENKANNA Forget it, Rayare, Anyway, on the morning of the 31st the foundation stone will be laid by bagavan Babu...

SHAMA With the hands that usually hold scales...

VENKANNA What? *(Laughing)* It is certain that the laying of the stone will be by hands that hold scales, isn't it? There should be no objection to publishing the news, is there?

JAYARAYA *(Not seeming to have attended to it)* Yes... *(Goes towards the inner door)*

VENKANNA I better let the office know.

JAYARAYA *(From near the door)* Have your dinner first.

VENKANNA No... I mean...

SHAMA Don't bother to remove your shirt. Keep it on. *(As his father looks at him)* Let the secret inside not come out.

Jayaraya smiles and goes in

VENKANNA (Making sure Jayaraya has gone) Jayarao is a serious type, you see.

SHAMA That's why he looks comic in this situation.

VENKANNA What do you mean? Or, have you started your...

SHAMA *(Interrupting him)* The future. *(As Venkanna stares at him)* What are you staring at? Think of what I tell you is the future. This is the starting point of the tragedy I spoke about. And then, even the bomb that was thrown at Gandhiji today-

JAYARAYA *(From inside)* What's that? What? *(Comes out. His arms are still raised as he has not finished removing his shirt)* What did you say, Shama? A bomb aimed at Gandhiji?

VENKANNA *(Making light of it)* It's nothing, Rayare. At the prayer meeting today...

JAYARAYA *(As if utterly confused)* It's nothing, did you say? *(Coming forward)* Shama, turn on the radio. *(Walking towards the outer door)* Shall I go into the town? The news... *(Stopping)* Eh, Govindappa *(Coming near the inner door)* Govindappa... *('Coming' Govindappa replies from inside)*

VENKANNA It's nothing. That's the truth, Rayare. The bomb fell somewhere. Mahatmaji laughed and...

JAYARAYA *(Interrupting)* He laughed, did he? He is the type who laughs even when he is dying...

SHAMA *(Interrupting)* I listened to the radio. No one is hurt...

JAYARAYA Did you yourself hear it?

GOVINDAPPA *(Coming in)* What's the matter, Rayare?

SHAMA Believe me, I myself heard it.

GOVINDAPPA Did you want me, Rayare?

JAYARAYA *(To Govindappa)* Wait a minute. *(To Shama)* What really happened?

RANGAMMA *(Coming from inside)* I had served the food and it's cold now. Are you coming now or...?

JAYARAYA *(To Rangamma)* Wait a minute. Listen to this. Someone threw a bomb at Gandhiji!

GOVINDAPPA What? what a ghastly thing to happen!

RANGAMMA *(Not grasping the situation)* What did you say?

JAYARAYA *(In an irritated voice)* Bomb! Bomb! He would have been killed immediately!

RANGAMMA *(Heaving a sigh)* Ayya! You have gone mad after all this time! The man who threw the bomb will have his hand burnt but nothing will happen to even a single strand of hair on Gandhiji's head!

VENKANNA You are right, Rangamma Nothing has happened to him. Rayaru is worried for nothing!

JAYARAYA *(Opens his mouth to say something. Unable to speak, he sits on the chair in front of the table. Govindappa is standing at the edge of the stage near the chair behind the small table. Rangamma is between them, standing near the inner door. Venkanna is near the sofa while Shama is standing near the chair to the left of the radio. All the four stand where they are looking at Jayaraya. No one speaks for a minute. Then Jayaraya lifts up his face and looks at all the four. Then he says to Venkanna)* Venkanna, Gandhiji's well-being is the whole world's well-being. What do you know? *(As if to himself)* You are boys. What do you know? How can you understand the experience of being in his presence? It is because he was such a daring man that thirty crores of people shed their impotence. He is a deathless magician who brought back thirty

crores who were dead back into life. *(To Rangamma)* You know it, don't you? Do you remember the first time we met him? Do you remember the scene? The smile on the face, the compassion in the eyes, the healing quality of his voice and the power of righteousness in his presence! Who was the one who first advised me to give up my legal practice?

RANGAMMA *(Slightly shy, embarrassed)* What can I say? It was something strange! I felt that life was worth living as soon as I saw that Mahatma. Listening to him talk would give me the same merit as listening to a thousand puranas, I felt. And so I told him straightaway, 'I will go home with you only if you give up your legal practice.'

JAYARAYA *(As if lost in the experience of those days)* If I hadn't given up my practice...

RANGAMMA I would have gone with the Mahatma. He had an ashrama somewhere.

JAYARAYA *(Drawing in a breath)* But, we didn't act according to his words. Never mind. The important thing is that he is safe and well.

RANGAMMA Come inside, won't you? I came out thinking that there had been a disaster!

JAYARAYA You go in, I will join you. *(To Govindappa)* It's late for you. Have your dinner here. Let's celebrate the good news by having a meal together. Come, come. *(Pushes Govindappa in and follows him)*

VENKANNA How sentimental Rayaru is! He forgets himself when he hears Mahatamaji's name.

SHAMA *(Not wanting to talk about it)* Come, let's go and have our dinner.

VENKANNA *(Removing his coat, he speaks as if to himself)* I wonder whether it is good to be so sentimental when one is in politics...

SHAMA *(Interrupting)* Come, that will do. Your job is to print facts as you see them.

VENKANNA *(Keeping the coat on the sofa)* I don't know! God has given us both intelligence and feelings too.

SHAMA *(Interrupting)* Intelligence is for being happy and dying. Feelings are for being unhappy and becoming immortal.

VENKANNA *(Stops, surprised)* What did you say?

SHAMA *(Smiling)* One is Ashokachakra and the other is Shokachakra... *(Pushes in Venkanna and follows him)*

There should be silence on the stage with no one there. And then, the sound of an owl hooting twice is heard. Immediately after, darkness spreads on the stage. With that

The Curtain falls

ACT THREE

Total darkness on the stage. Words are heard but the actors are not seen. When the instruction 'light' is given, the faces of the characters should be lit up just for a second before it is dark on the stage again. To make the scene more effective, pairs of characters should stand at different places on the stage and talk. As soon as the curtain rises, words like, 'Listen to me first,' and 'Enough of listening and doing.' from Hanmanthappa and Bheemanna are heard.

HANMANTHAPPA Eh, Bheemanna, listen to my words.

BHEEMANNA *(Irritatedly)* What's there to listen to? You saw it yourself yesterday, didn't you, Hanmanthappa? It is not possible to invite a Minister everyday and it is not possible for him to come either. That's why it was suggested that since we have the laying of the foundation stone for the market just once we invite some Minister or the other... *(As if the whole thing was contemptible)* Who should we invite? Bagavan Babu, he says! We don't even know whether he would take his surname from his father or his mother, if ever he went to school! Should we have an old man like that coming on such an occasion? You saw it all yourself and now you ask me to listen to you!

HANMANTHAPPA You also speak like that Ramanna! I had believed that you would think about things before speaking.

BHEEMANNA *(Ridiculing it)* Think about things? Who allows one to think in the meeting? Your Jayaraya is already there with his own ideas!

HANMANTHAPPA Let it be. Laying a foundation stone is not that important. Anyone can do it. Even a mason! We don't need a Minister for it. We shall invite a Minister for the inauguration, once the building is ready.

BHEEMANNA *(Taken aback)* Once the building is ready! Are you really building the market?

HANMANTHAPPA What do you mean?

BHEEMANNA Look, This was an old man's crazy idea which wouldn't leave him we thought and so raised our hands. If the market is going to be really built, we should bother about things like who gets the contract etc...

HANMANTHAPPA *(Interrupting)* That's why I am asking you to attend the meeting. If all of you get angry and stay away, he will give the contract to someone he wants. Don't you think so?

BHEEMANNA Eh, Hanmanthappa, I have had enough of this affair! I got in because a few of my own men were there in it... *(Light on the stage)*

HANMANTHAPPA Of what use is it to your men if you don't attend the meeting?

BHEEMANNA What do you mean? Why should I have come into the Municipality except to be of use to some people? I have my shop. I have things in it that I need! I was fed up sitting in the shop and so thought that I would be helping myself and others by becoming a member. And now, this pointless worry. Do you know what he was suggesting this evening? Wants an award instituted in every lane of the town! *(Laughing contemptuously)* Those who keep their lane the cleanest get the award! Hm, may be, he will have it presented by a scavenger!

HANMANTHAPPA Look, our hands are tied this once. It doesn't become us if we get into a fight for nothing!

BHEEMANNA *(Interrupting)* Hm... Isn't that why all of us raised our hands yesterday? Let me say it again. I don't fancy this meaningless friction and so let's not be present at the meeting.

HANMANTHAPPA There you are, saying the same thing again...

BHEEMANNA *(Interrupting)* It's late. Let me be there at the shop to close it at least. Look, speak to Ramanna. Ask the secre-

tary. I agree to whatever they say. Alright? *(In an excited tone)* I won't let this go on for long. Remember!

HANMANTHAPPA Shall we meet tomorrow then?

BHEEMANNA Anyway, meet the secretary tomorrow... *(The voices fade in a distance. After a minute, two more voices are heard from another part of the stage. 'Take it, I will throw it at your face', and 'Are you mad or what?' The voices are those of Hanmanthappa and the secretary.)*

SECRETARY Do you want me to say it again? I am throwing it at your face. Take it!

HANMANTHAPPA You too are crazy! You are the secretary of the party and you talk like this?

SECRETARY *(Pretending to be surprised)* Party? Where is the party? Didn't I warn you in the beginning itself that you shouldn't let this creature into our company? Party, you say! Where is it, the useless party? *(Laughing contemptuously)* Hm... Enough of this stupid game. *(Light on the stage)* Here, my resignation! Your Municipality and you!

HANMANTHAPPA *(In an irritated tone)* Do you think that I don't know how to resign and get out? I will have the letter written and sign it at the bottom. What does one gain by having done that big thing?

SECRETARY *(In a mocking tone)* Nothing! Hanging on to the end of his dhoti like a bunch of thorns is a big thing, isn't it? He will throw you all away in no time! We are there to do the work and someone else is there to receive the honour. Haven't I been telling you all through that such a setup won't work?

HANMANTHAPPA How immature can you be! What is this honour to the old man that you are talking about? Wait. People fold their hands, I know, when they meet him. It's not the type of honour that will take him forward, remember. It is nothing but the fear within that's simmering!

SECRETARY Fear?

HANMANTHAPPA Yes, fear! This is the fate of all those who want to move up. Their intelligence, strength and determination--people are scared because of these qualities. Afraid that they may do anything at any time, people choose to show their respect at a distance by folding their hands...

SECRETARY *(In a defeated voice)* Hanmanthappa, you know me by now. Why do we work ourselves up like this? What do we want? Wherever Hanmanthappa is, we are there, behind him. It has been like that for ten years...

HANMANTHAPPA *(Slightly embarrassed)* Did I deny it...?

SECRETARY *(Interrupting him)* I am expressing nothing but what is there in our minds. If Hanmanthappa goes further forwards, we who are behind him may also get our chance, That, in short, is our calculation.

HANMANTHAPPA I know it, don't I!

SECRETARY What we want is that our men should get respect because of our work.

HANMANTHAPPA *(In a slightly obstinate tone)* What has happened now?

SECRETARY You are asking what has happened now, are you? Even remembering a single sentence from the meeting is enough to light a fire inside us. You were there this evening listening to everything and you now ask what has happened?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Still sounding obstinate)* Tell me, how long do you think this can go on?

SECRETARY *(Light on the stage)* How long? That old man is not embarrassed even when he knows he has lost. Of what use are your calculations? Here, Let his reign go on for however long, we can't bear it anymore. This is the final word! *(Starts to leave)*

HANMANTHAPPA Eh, listen, listen... *(Voice fades into the distance)*

SECRETARY *(His voice fading away at a greater distance)* This is the final word!

HANMANTHAPPA And now, this fellow has also gone, like the other one. They are all leaving me... Why? *(As if clenching his teeth)* All on account of that Jayaraya... *(In a tone of having decided something)* Something has to be done. I had thought the old man had a worthy quality about him. I didn't expect this quality to be something which would be at our throats. As long as he is there, he won't allow anyone else to do anything. If he becomes the leader... *(In a tone of jealousy)* it will mean the end of everything. If we have to be reckoned at all, he has to obey us. Must do something. Must throw him out of the party. If tomorrow's festival turns out to be a success, we won't have a face to show in public. If the festival tomorrow....

SHEENAPPA *(The light is on him)* The festival is not tomorrow, Hanmanthappa. It's the day after. Wait and see... The festival shall be a roaring success!

HANMANTHAPPA What did you say?

SHEENAPPA I said that the festival will be a success. Didn't I tell you in the beginning itself that you have no chance at all to win against the old man? Do you know what is taking place now? Because one of their own men is laying the foundation stone, all the gardeners and vegetable sellers have become volunteers and are putting up the mantapa, decorating and cleaning the place...

HANMANTHAPPA It means that all of us who opposed the idea have our faces blackened.

SHEENAPPA I think it's going to be tough getting elected the next time.

HANMANTHAPPA Hm.

SHEENAPPA Ramanna is furious.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Heaving a sigh)* Hm...

RAMANNA *(Suddenly appearing)* Why are you breathing in and out like a dog which has been kicked around? We told you: 'Your Jayaraya may be a big man but we don't want him with us as this is something the party has to do. 'Don't, don't bring him in,' we said. We did tell you, didn't we? What is the gain if the town is fine but the party is gone to dogs? It took ten years of toil on our part to build the party. We spent ten years in jail grinding sand and becoming old. Is he in any way more intelligent than any one of us? A pious man he is, is he? If so, he should be in heaven, not here, breaking stones on our hearts. Listen to me, Hanmanthappa, if people like this have their way, you and I will have no place in this world. What kind of a principled man is he? He took a thousand rupees for erecting the mantapa, but now gets the gardeners to erect it free?

SHEENAPPA *(Surprised)* A thousand...!

HANMANTHAPPA *(Surprised)* But Jayaraya hasn't taken it...

RAMANNA So what? The news has spread meanwhile.

SHEENAPPA and HANMANTHAPPA *(together)* But it is a false rumour...

RAMANNA *(Intolerant)* Does it matter whether it's a false rumour or that you are stupid? We will have achieved our end by the time it is proved false!

BHEEMANNA *(Coming in suddenly)* Did you hear the news? Someone has spread it! Promising an award, he is getting the drainage done on his street.

SECRETARY *(Coming in suddenly)* Did you hear it? Having given up legal practice, it seems Jayaraya is running his house on the.money from the municipality...

HANMANTHAPPA *(Utterly shaken)* No, it is not like that at all. Listen to me...

RAMANNA *(Laughing)* You listen! Your Jayaraya will be singing!

One hears the following as the background song. 'Ranghupati Raghava Rajaram! Pathita Pavana Sitaram! Raghupati Raghava Rajaram! Patita

Pavana Sitaram! As the song fades, the whole stage is lit up and the scene in the beginning appears. It is Jayaraya's house. Time midnight. Within a minute of the scene coming to view, Govindappa comes up the stairs from its rear end. His face shows he is upset about something. We hear people screaming at a distance. A red light flashes once in the distance and disappears. Looking at it

GOVINDAPPA *(frightened)* Rangamma! *(Goes to the stairs and looks down)* Rangamma! Rangamma! *(Comes to the centre of the stage and looks down the skylight)* Rangamma, Come soon! Here, come up! *(Gets up and looks around)*

RANGAMMA *(Coming up the stairs slowly)* What's the matter, Govindappa? What?

GOVINDAPPA *(Without saying anything, he points in a particular direction and asks)* Did you see it?

RANGAMMA *(Looking)* What's that? Where? *(Turns around and stares at Govindappa)...*

GOVINDAPPA I am wondering too!

RANGAMMA It looks as if it is the centre of the town. Is it, Govindappa?

GOVINDAPPA *(Listening intently)* Did you hear it? People are screaming somewhere. *(Stops)* Didn't you hear it?

RANGAMMA *(Taking in her breath)* Who knows what's happening there? If only he had come home by now...

GOVINDAPPA He will be here soon, Rangamma.

RANGAMMA No one would have thought such a moment will come, Govindappa.

GOVINDAPPA Nobody can say anything definite, be it about either man or country. Can you imagine a man like Gandhiji coming to this state...? *(As suddenly a bright light flashes and dies)* Did you see it? That's what I was talking about. A fire is burning somewhere.

RANGAMMA Govindappa, I am worried too, Govindappa. It must be midnight now and he hasn't come home. Shama is also not here. Please go and see, will you?

GOVINDAPPA *(Not sure it is right)* But you will be alone in the house. *(As if he heard)* Did you hear it? People seem to be shouting Jai!

RANGAMMA There must have been some good news now! What do you think?

GOVINDAPPA *(Surprised)* Good news?

RANGAMMA I mean... Did they come out with an announcement rather hastily? May be, by now, some highly qualified doctors might have come together and saved him! *(Suddenly, in an irritated tone)* If only Shama were here, we could have listened to the radio...

GOVINDAPPA *(Shaking his head in sadness)* Rangamma, bad news is rarely false. If the news was false, either Rayaru or Shamarayaru would have first come home and let us know. *(Stopping suddenly)* Aka! *(In a tone of surprise)* What could it be, I wonder! A fire somewhere? Or...

RANGAMMA *(In a tone of helplessness)* Govindappa, who can say what will happen when it is an inauspicious hour? Would you mind going into the town and see what is happening? He may be in a meeting or busy doing something. He hasn't come still...

A voice calls from below and is heard in the background. It is Venkanna's breathless voice. 'Rayare, Rayare, who's there inside? Eh, Shama!' Rangamma asks 'Who's it? Venkanna? What? Who?' Govindappa joins her. 'Who's it? Who do you want? Is it Venkannaraya? Just a minute, I am coming.' While they are talking, Venkanna's voice continues to be heard. As a result, there is commotion on the stage for a couple of minutes. All the three voices fall silent suddenly

RANGAMMA Just a minute, Venkanna... *(Starts)*

GOVINDAPPA *(Moving ahead of her)* Have you shut the front door? Wait, I'll go and open the door. *(Goes to the side of the stage and looking down)* Wait a minute, Venkanna! *(Walks to the rear and goes down)*

Rangamma stares at the place where there was a sudden flash and wipes the sweat off her forehead with the pallu of her saree. It looks as if her tongue is dry. Finally she fans herself with the pallu. It is obvious that her mind is elsewhere while she is doing all these things. Meanwhile, Venkanna followed by Govindappa comes up in a hurry. Speaks suddenly) Where did you come from, Venkanna? Did you come from the meeting? He isn't here....

VENKANNA *(Interrupting)* There was no meeting today, Rangamma...

RANGAMMA *(In a frightened voice)* Where is he then if there was no meeting?

VENKANNA *(Pacifying her)* Rayaru? He is in the municipality waiting for further news. I had asked Shama to stay with him. I am now on my way to that place and stopped to find out if he has come home.

RANGAMMA Neither of them has come, Venkanna.

VENKANNA *(With a false laugh)* You may worry. The news, it has hit the country like a thunderbolt.

RANGAMMA Did it turn out to be true then? I had hoped that something else... *(Venkanna shakes his head sadly).* We should have closed our eyes long ago, Venkanna. *(Stops as tears fill her eyes)*

VENKANNA Rangamma, Please go in and take rest. I will bring both of them back. Govindappa will stay awake and open the door...

GOVINDAPPA *(Interrupting)* I will stay awake. You go and lie down.

RANGAMMA Will you come back soon, Venkanna? *(She leaves)*

VENKANNA What else is there for me to do? As soon as I reach the place... *(Noticing that Rangamma has gone down, he stops talking, tiptoes to the stairs, makes sure she has gone and talks in a whisper hurriedly)* Govindappa, listen to me and don't say anything. I am leaving this minute. I want you to do one

thing. Shut all the doors and don't leave the house for anything. *(Stops after having started)* Not even if your life is in danger!

GOVINDAPPA *(Stopping him)* Venkanna, what has happened to Rayaru? Where is he?

VENKANNA I will bring him from wherever he is. You...

GOVINDAPPA *(Interrupting)* No, I say no. You stay here. Rangamma is alone here.

VENKANNA *(In an attempt to persuade him)* Govindappa, let's not waste any time, I know where Jayaraya is and what the situation is like. I will straight away go and...

GOVINDAPPA *(In a determined tone)* Look, this Govindappa should be where Rayaru is. It is his breath that keeps me alive. Venkanna, it doesn't matter if you don't tell us. It is clear to me that he is in some danger. That's why I should...

VENKANNA Govindappa, Rangamma is all alone in the house...

GOVINDAPPA That's why I asked you to stay back. Even if you leave me here, I will get out of the house. I have to.

VENKANNA *(Coming to a decision that minute)* Alright. You go then. Don't say a word downstairs as you go out. *(Pointing with his finger)* There, See the fire burning? *(Govindappa nods his head)* That's the mantapa of tomorrow's festival.

GOVINDAPPA *(Stunned)* What? Fire in the festival's mantapa?

VENKANNA *(Interrupting)* Some bad elements have torched it and Rayaru must be trying to douse the fire. You should go there... *(As Govindappa is about to go running)* Wait. Shama has now gone in that direction while I came here to find out. Look for Shama. *(As Govindappa starts to go)* The important thing is to get Jayaraya out safely. I am not worried about Shama. *(As Govindappa goes down the stairs)* Govindappa...

Runs to Govindappa and whispers something in his ears. Govindappa nods his head and rushes down the stairs. Walks slowly to the centre

of the stage, then to the edge, peers down and not knowing what to do, clenches his firsts and comes back to the centre

VENKANNA The only achievement of honesty is in raising the banner of deceit *(Look ahead)* There, the dazzling light from the rogues' banner!

RANGAMMA *(Showing just her face on the stairs)* Govindappa...

VENKANNA *(As if waking up that minute)* What? Why, haven't you slept yet, Rangamma?

RANGAMMA *(Coming up)* Why did Govindappa go out?

VENKANNA *(With a false smile on his face)* He said he would go and bring back Jayaraya, He wanted me to stay here. Fine, you do that, I said.

RANGAMMA *(Comes up, talking as if to herself)* Who knows what has happened and what you are talking about? I just can't make any sense of it. As soon as I close my eyes, I think of Delhi. These people didn't let that Mahatma live. Ever since I heard the news, I have a feeling that it is an omen of something bad the world has to face, that's why I can't close my eyes ever since Rayaru left the place.

VENKANNA *(As if consoling her)* Jayaraya is the one who consoles the entire town. The people listen to him because he is the elder...

RANGAMMA *(Interrupting)* I have had enough of this talk of his being the elder. Tell me, what's the use of it? Our own grown-up children won't listen to us at home. And so...

VENKANNA But the entire town has acknowledged that he is the leader...

RANGAMMA *(Interrupting)* May be times have changed or may be, we have grown old. I used to like all these things when he gave up his legal practice. I liked his mixing with the people and being considered a leader. Things were different then, Venkanna. Whereever one went, one had the strength coming from Mahatmaji's name. We all walked in the light

he gave out. But these days it is as if we are walking in darkness. We have to take each step with great care...

VENKANNA *(Smiling weakly)* It is as if one can't but have the dream even if one fights sleep. Hm... It is late in the night...

RANGAMMA Can't go to sleep because of the anxiety that it's so late, Venkanna...

('Govindappa' a voice calls from below. Surprised) Isn't it Shama's voice?

VENKANNA *(Walks to the edge and looks down)* Hm... Wait for the door to open.

(Noticing that Rangamma's eyes are not on him, he gestures to Shama to keep quiet) Wait, I am coming! *(Goes down)*

RANGAMMA *(As if talking to herself)* Oh, my legs, they seem to give way! My whole body shuddered when I heard Shama's voice. Why hasn't his father come, I wonder. *(She goes slowly)*

The stage is empty for a minute or two. The light from a fire burning flashes for a second. Everything then is like in the beginning, but at a distance. We hear the chorus singing 'Raghupati Raghava Rajaram. Patitipavana Sitaram!' The singing should fade into the distance after it has been repeated once or twice so that the words are unclear. Meanwhile, Venkanna comes up the stairs followed by Shama. Shama keeps looking down as he comes up. He stops on the topmost step, bends down a little and speaks to his mother

SHAMA He is not an ordinary man! He will come in the car at the rear. We are lucky, aren't we? Thanks to him, we may get some tea in this midnight's cold. Hm... *(Suddenly climbs up, pulls himself to the front of the stage and asks Venkanna in an excited whisper)* did you hear it? The mantapa has been reduced to ashes!

VENKANNA *(Nodding his head)* Where is Jayarayaru?

SHAMA They have taken him to the hospital.

VENKANNA *(Frightened)* What? To the hospital?

SHAMA It's nothing to be frightened about. Nothing untoward has happened till now.

VENKANNA *(Surprised)* Till now! What do you mean by that?

SHAMA *(Sharply)* Do you think it is all over? The evil that was built up over the years has burst out the minute a bullet was fired in Delhi. It was contained by force and now it has come out with the same force.

VENKANNA *(Still surprised like before)* Tell me, how did the atmosphere change so radically all of a sudden? As soon as I heard the news at six, I went out and all over the town the news had spread. People had dropped everything they were doing and moved around aimlessly. How did all that turn into something like this?

SHAMA *(Interrupting)* Is not everything still just before a storm breaks out? I had my suspicion, though. That's why I too left as soon as my father left. I knew how shattered he was by the news from Delhi. He went and declared a holiday for the office of the municipality. He wandered around the office and went to his room and just sat there. I was there outside talking to people. I don't know how time passed. It was perhaps around nine. My father came out and went towards the place of the festival. I walked along with him. There were groups of people standing here and there all along the road. We two were the only ones walking. Gradually I noticed that people were staring at us. They would start whispering among themselves once we passed the spot. Once I thought they laughed behind us. My body shuddered and I quietly looked back. Many groups were quietly following us. Anyway, we came to the place of the mantapa. All work had stopped there. My father stopped on reaching the spot and stood still like a sculpture. People were there standing behind us in a group. I don't know for how long we stood there like that! I came to only when a stone was thrown from the back. My father turned round like a mad man. Another stone hit him on the jaw at that moment. His lips

started bleeding and before we knew what was happening, there was a rush of people. Screams all around. My only thought was to get my father out from there. Meanwhile someone set fire to the mantapa. In the light of the fire, the scene looked frightful and people appeared to be anything but human. There wouldn't have been a single tear shed even if the entire crowd had been burnt alive. Beasts! It was a herd of wild animals! My father let out a scream and rushed into the mantapa. I too rushed behind him. I don't know for how long this went on. When I came to, all that I noticed was that the crowd had dispersed and the mantapa had been burnt. It was when I was looking around that Govindappa came. He had pushed his way through the crowd. He was like a wounded tiger. His shirt was in shreds and his forehead was bleeding. He was limping besides. The moment I saw him, I felt that we should be getting out. The two of us took my father to the nearest doctor...

VENKANNA *(Scared)* Does that mean that Jayaraya....

SHAMA It's nothing serious. The doctor will wash the wound and bring him home in his car... I hurried home because Govindappa told me that you were here, scared.

VENKANNA *(As if talking to himself, but in mounting anger)* It's utterly shameful! What a thing to happen to a decent person like Jayaraya!

SHAMA *(Sadly)* But this is not the end of the ordeal! *(As Venkanna looks at him curiously)* If we pass the night safely, If our house doesn't suffer the same fate as the mantapa...

As Venkanna looks at him blankly, he walks towards the railing on the left of the stage and stands there looking into the distance. Venkanna hesitates for a minute and then walks towards Shama. In the distance is heard the bhajan 'Raghupati Raghava Rajaram, Patita Pavana Sitaram!' It is also slightly windy and Shama's hair is not in its place as a result. As he straightens it, he looks at Venkanna. At that moment, there is the sound of the horn

VENKANNA and SHAMA *(Together)* He must have come! *(They rush downstairs)*

If possible, The bhajan should be played on instruments only. Gradually, its tempo increases. The following scene may go on for a while depending up on the tempo

After a minute Govindappa comes up in a hurry carrying an easy chair on his head. There is a bandage on his forehead. He goes to the staircase after keeping the chair down.

GOVINDAPPA One is enough, Shamarayare. One will do. Look, make sure the front door is closed tight. Draw the bolt if there is one. Keep something heavy against the door. And bring Jayararaya up quickly.

SHAMA *(Coming up)* What's all this, Govindappa? What is happening? This anxiety even after reaching home? *Govindappa does not pay any attention to Shama, goes to the edge on the right, listens and comes slowly towards Shama*

GOVINDAPPA *(In Shama's ears)* Hundreds of people are coming this way. We saw it on our way here. They didn't suspect anything as it was the doctor's car. They have torches in their hands and are hurling stones...

SHAMA *(In sheer contempt)* Animals, wild animals! Where could they be going?

GOVINDAPPA *(Lowering his voice)* They are shouting 'Down with Jayaraya!'

SHAMA What?

GOVINDAPPA *(Walking towards the right)* Let us keep Jayaraya here and stand guard around him. *(As he talks, he has rolled up his sleeves involuntarily)*

Shama wants to say something. However, he stops, takes a few steps slowly and then runs down the stairs

GOVINDAPPA *(Constantly looking to his right and walking back, he speaks as if to himself)* 'Down with Jayaraya! 'Is that what they

are shouting? Let me see who has the courage to do anything! Ungrateful wretches! Traitors! First, let them pass this Govindappa. *(Stops suddenly and looks around in terror)* No, no! Such a thing to happen! They don't care about the consequences of what they do. *(Starts running downstairs, Meanwhile, the horn sounds like in the first scene 'He has come, has he?' He exclaims and runs down)*

As that moment Jayaraya comes up slowly, holding Venkanna's hand and saying, 'Who said it was your fault?' His clothes are dishevelled. Blood from his jaw has congealed on the left side of the white coat he has on. He has a bandage on the left side of his mouth. The right sleeve is filthy- the result of his fall. The right side of his dhoti is slightly torn. Venkanna seats him gently on the easy chair. Jayaraya comes near the chair and asks, 'Who says it's your fault? No one is on the stage except Venkanna.

JAYARAYA *(In a surprised tone)* Where is Hanmanthappa? He was talking to me!

VENKANNA He's coming. He must be downstairs talking to Rangamma.

JAYARAYA *(After a minute's silence)* When a thousand people go mad and start fighting, tell me, who do you blame?

VENKANNA But setting fire to the mantapa... And then raising their hands against you...

JAYARAYA *(Feeling ashamed about having laughed)* You are crazy! It's not my mantapa. I am not the only big man in the town...

VENKANNA But there are people who think so. And that's why the suspicion.

JAYARAYA *(Breathing in)* Venkanna, today we lost our self-control as a nation... I would have been pleased if I had lost my life in all that commotion.

VENKANNA Che! Che! What a thing to say!

JAYARAYA *(As if to himself)* I told you once before that our days are over, didn't I? Venkanna, I contracted, perhaps, the

madness that is natural to old age. I thought that everything that is pleasant was good. I was wrong. Only the things that we feel are needed are good. Hm... I set out to do something that I didn't have to do...

VENKANNA *(In a tone of intense feeling)* Something that you didn't have to do? What was that?

JAYARAYA *(Staring at him)* Who can say? Democracy is not the place where merit matters. What people say is the final thing. *(Smiling in spite of his grief)* They socked me on the jaw so that the old man would get the point.

(They turn towards the staircase as they hear Govindappa's voice saying, 'What has that got to do to you? You go up first.' 'Hanmanthappa comes up followed by Govindappa who is carrying a bucket of water in each hand)

HANMANTHAPPA What is wrong with Govindappa? Why did he shout at me and prevented me from bringing the buckets upstairs?

GOVINDAPPA *(Keeping the buckets near the right end of the stage, he turns)* You want to know what has happened? *(Pointing towards Jayaraya)* Look at him! When there are ungrateful and heartless murderers in the town who are prepared to finish that old man who has spent his entire life in the service of the people...

HANMANTHAPPA *(Interrupting)* Ela, ela! Who are you attacking, Govidappa? I just got the news. I came by car as soon as I heard it...

JAYARAYA *(Stopping him)* I got the resignation letters of all of you.

VENKANNA *(Taken aback)* What's this? Who? What?

JAYARAYA You don't know this yet, Venkanna. It was today--it may as well have been yesterday--Hanmanthappa has given a resignation letter with the signatures of all. I am now alone in the Municipality.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Moves to the left of Jayarao)* Don't take us amiss. I knew you would mistake us and so gathered all the members and explained things to them. They are prepared to take back the resignation letters. The truth of the matter is that you are tired because of the workload. If you are prepared to withdraw and rest...

JAYARAYA *(Interrupting)* You're suggesting I should resign now, aren't you?

GOVINDAPPA Otherwise, they will set the house on fire.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Surprised)* What did you say?

VENKANNA *(Shocked)* Set the house alight!

JAYARAYA That's why Govindappa has brought buckets of water and kept them here. Do you think I didn't notice things on the way, Govindappa? People are out there with torches in hand shouting, 'Down with Jayarao. Finish him off!'

HANMANTHAPPA What can one do? It's the work of some loafers. I saw them too and told them off. They went back...

GOVINDAPPA Obviously, they are people who listen to what Hanmanthappa says.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Getting angry)* What are you implying, Govindappa? Is this your gratitude to me for having sent back the ones that were wanting to set the house on fire? *(To Jayaraya)* Rayare, I think it is best that you resign...

JAYARAYA *(Interrupting)* What if I don't?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Taken aback for a minute)* If you don't... You will be tying up the hands of people like us. We are there to help you...

GOVINDAPPA *(Reacting strongly)* Eh, Who are you helping? *(Moves aggressively towards Hanmanthappa.)*

JAYARAYA *(Gets up and restrains him)* Keep quiet, Govindappa. *(To Hanmanthappa)* I won't resign, Hanmanthappa.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Irritated)* You mean...

JAYARAYA *(Spelling it out)* I... Won't... resign!

HANMANTHAPPA So be it. But remember that, if you don't, there will be no one in the Municipality apart from you.

VENKANNA *(Contemptuously)* Doesn't matter. Jayaraya is capable of carrying on alone.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Angrily)* You are a crazy one, Venkanna! You write in papers and then talk like this. 'He is capable' you say! Remember, however big a man is, he won't be able to move even a straw unless he has a party to back him. Do you realise that? If the party doesn't stand by one, it is impossible to know who is a big man and how big.

RANGAMMA *(Suddenly coming up)* Get lost, bastard! Go and jump into the well with your party! *(Ignoring Jayaraya's attempts to stop her)* He comes here to give his advice! Party, did you say? It is a party only if you are the boss. Right? Ayya! How clever can you be! Not wanting to be in the way of one another, a few cunning ones get together. It becomes a party then! Go, we don't need either you or your party!

HANMANTHAPPA *(Controlling his anger)* Rangamma, this is politics...

RANGAMMA *(Stopping him)* Is that why you don't want women to enter politics? You were the ones in the past who shouted till you went hoarse that women should join the politics of jail going. Weren't you? I know! Politics is a way of getting your things done. If you had that much sense, *(Pointing her husband)* ones like him wouldn't have been in such a state!

JAYARAYA *(Showing surprise)* 'In such a state?' What is the matter with me now?

RANGAMMA You are all alone now.

JAYARAYA *(Surprised)* Alone? Did you say I am alone? I have a friend here *(Indicating Govindappa)* who is prepared to lay down his life for my sake. I have young men like *(Showing*

Venkanna) him who are prepared to do anything out of affection fro me. And a wife *(Looking at Rangamma)* who gives me strength when I am feeling low and exhausted! How then can I be alone?

HANMANTHAPPA Rayare, All this is words, just words and the joy one gets using them! If you don't get out now, no one will be happy. Not even you...

VENKANNA *(Interrupting)* He won't be happy, did you say? How can you know what happiness means for people like him?

HANMANTHAPPA *(Surprised)* What do you mean by saying people like him? They are also human beings just like us, aren't they?

RANGAMMA *(With contempt in her voice)* Human beings like you? Ayyayya!

GOVINDAPPA *(Equally contemptuous)* Like you? Ha, ha! Like him, he says!

VENKANNA Like you?

(As all the three are talking in this manner Hanmanthappa looks blankly at every one of them)

HANMANTHAPPA *(Swallowing his spittle)* If he is not the same... What is he then?

From a distance is heard the following

Samadrishteene trishna tyagi
Parastree jene matare
Jivhathaki asatya na bole
Paradhana na vajhule hathare

(As everyone is standing still as it finishes)

SHAMA *(Coming up)* Did you understand, Hanmanthappa?

Again from a distance

Vaishnava janatho tene kahiye
Je peeda parayi janere

SHAMA *(Like a friend, in a tone of familiarity)* If you haven't still understood, listen to this attentively:

Paradhkhe upakara kare toye
Mana abhimna na janere

As these lines are heard, everyone, excepting Jayaraya and Govindappa, are looking in the distance, with their faces tuned in different directions. They continue to stand like that even at the end of the lines. Only Jayaraya lifts up his face and looks at Hanmanthappa with great tenderness in his eyes. Hanmanthappa stands and stares at him, as if he is under a spell. Suddenly, he clutches his head

HANMANTHAPPA What's this? It's as if someone has cast a spell...

SHAMA *(Running towards him)* What happened, Hanmanthappa? What's the matter? Take care... *(Prevents him from falling)*

HANMANTHAPPA *(Still holding his head)* There is a chakra spinning in my head...

SHAMA It's spinning not in your head, but in front of you. Open your eyes and see.

HANMANTHAPPA *(Frightened)* A chakra? What chakra?

SHAMA Shokachakra *(Stopping Hanmanthappa who has opened his mouth to say something)* Shokachakra... Shokachakra, the national flag of the kingdom of heart...

Again from a distance-

Paraduhkhe upakara kare toye
mana abhimana na janere

The characters on the stage walk slowly towards Jayaraya. The curtain falls as if the fall marks the rhythm of their steps.



DARKNESS AND LIGHT

(1959)

Kattale Belaku

Translated by G.S.Amur



Preface

This is a new experiment. Here art, life, criticism... all are present. The technique is new. It is not my fault that I am writing plays that do not take into account the limits and possibilities of our theatre. If the theatre does not grow as I grow from play to play and my style and technique develop, the responsibility rests with our social life and not with playwrights like me. Even the ability to understand and appreciate the plays I have written so far has been rarely witnessed. I am confident that Karnataka will see better dramatists than me if, on the evidence of work going on in a few places, organisational effort of the right type and selfless, dispassionate and expert encouragement from some quarters, the theatre is raised to a higher level. If people who have been asleep the whole night suddenly wake up and see the bright sun, they may not be able to see at all. That is the reason why the dawn is proud that it is a comfortable and beautiful way to light.

Sriranga

ACT ONE

It is the time of evening. There is no one on the stage when the curtain goes up. To the left of the audience in the corner is seen the main door of a house, closed at the moment. There are three or four steps leading to the door. As you come out of the door, to the left, there is a window. It is now shut. The wall on the other side of the door goes across the stage and disappears. The wall with the window stretches to the centre of the backstage, but does not touch it. Some one could enter the stage from that side. Rest of the stage is empty. But to the right of the audience-- at the back of the stage-- there is a cluster of trees. The remaining area is covered by small bushes, grass etc., giving it a natural look. The sun has almost set and darkness has started spreading. But because of moonlight everything on the stage, excepting the area in the shadow of the house and the trees, is visible.

An owl is heard hooting moments after the curtain goes up and a face appears from behind the wall at the backstage. The face shows a mixture of fear, hatred and sorrow. It looks round and when the owl hoots for the second time disappears.

This is followed by a brief silence. The face appears again, looking round. Making sure that everything is quiet, it moves forward. Now we come to know that it belongs to a person dressed in torn clothes. The man runs towards the house and when he discovers that he can't proceed further, gets frightened, circles the stage and disappears among the trees.

There is silence for a few moments.

Gradually we begin to hear words from the right of the audience and three individuals enter, one of them leading the others. When the man in front speaks, the other two exchange glances. The pace of their walking, like the speed of their conversation, is slow.

FIRST INDIVIDUAL Didn't I tell you? I've been foolish. I've had enough of this experience.

SECOND INDIVIDUAL If you start speaking like that, Sir, what shall people like us do?

FIRST INDIVIDUAL I can't tell you that. One should be intelligent enough to know when one has been foolish.

THIRD INDIVIDUAL *(Laughing, as at a joke)* Oh, Sir, you don't mean that even that much intelligence is not left in us, we are utter fools. Do you, Sir?

F.I Who am I to tell you even that? I was talking about myself. You want me to write a play for you and I say I've had enough of it. I've been writing and staging plays for years now, and I am thoroughly worn out.

(He comes to the middle of the stage and faces both the individuals.)

S.I What you say may be true for you. Won't you listen to what we have to say?

F.I What do you mean by that? Are we rehearsing a play here or what?

T.I Well, Sir, I'll tell you what the matter is. You've written plays in the past, haven't you? And you are still writing them. So, people who should know, learned people, have asked us to see you. That is why we are here.

F.I What? Did I hear you properly? Learned people sent you to me? They told you that I write plays? Wonder! Wonder of wonders!

S.I *(Confused)* What are you trying to tell us, sir?

F.I What else? Nobody knows my name. I write under a false one, so that no one knows my name.

T.I *(Takes it as a joke and laughs)* Ha, ha! Sir, you know how to talk. We are here, standing before you with folded hands. We'll do anything you ask us to do. All that we want is a new play from you.

F.I Are you really prepared to do as I say?

S.I & T.I Try us, Sir.

F.I All right, give up this idea of new plays. I am through with writing them.

S.I We had heard so. That's why we are here to talk to you.

F.I *(Surprised)* You knew I had given up writing plays and yet you want a new one from me? What are you trying to say?

T.I We will tell you the truth, Sir. Now, you were writing plays for years and you have stopped.

F.I Yes, That's it. I've sworn never even to think of writing one.

S.I If you had cared to listen to people like us, Sir, you would have done that long ago.

T.I Well, it doesn't make much difference even now. We are asking you to write a play.

F.I *(Surprised even more)* You approve of what I have done and yet you want me to write. I don't understand you.

S.I. No, no, you certainly did well in stopping to write...

T.I ...the kind of play you have been writing, sir.

F.I *(Confused)* Then? What kind of play do you think I should write?

S.I Look, Sir. You earned fame as a playwright. You produced play after play.

F.I That is exactly what I have done. I wrote play after play and was played out.

T.I *(Laughs as before)* Ha! ha!

S.I Look, Sir. How can any thing be called a play unless people want to come and see it on the stage?

T.I What you were doing Sir, was to write plays and publish them.

S.I That's exactly what I mean. It is not enough if people merely want to read a play.

F.I Then tell me. Who should want to read my plays?

S.I I admit Sir, people read your plays, admired them but...

F.I But, don't you see? I myself don't admit that.

T.I You are funny Sir *(laughs)*.

F.I Listen. I know no one has read my plays.

S.I Excellent. plays are meant to be seen.

F.I And no one has seen my plays.

T.I And yet you earned fame as a playwright. Didn't you Sir? All right, now you write the kind of play we want.

S.I And then we will see how people will not see it.

T.I Even if they have to pay for admission.

F.I. What do you mean? Are you going to bind them by law?

S.I We don't need laws for that Sir. We know what the people want. That's why we say...

T.I ... that you should write.

F.I So you think people will come to see my plays?

There is silence for a few moments as though they have exhausted themselves in reaching a big decision

F.I *(Takes a long breath, looks at the door and says)* All right. *(Looks at them)* You must forgive me. You are my guests and I haven't even invited you in. I've been talking to you in the street. Come, let's go inside.

S.I If you would oblige us this time Sir, We will be your frequent visitors. I am sure of that.

T.I Producing plays is our profession. How can we fail to see you again, Sir?

F.I Do you mean you are not coming in now?

S.I You've misunderstood us Sir.

T.I You will write the plays we want and we will come to you whenever you need us. This will go on now.

F.I But how are you so sure that I will write the plays?

S.I Not on your own Sir. We want you to write and you will oblige us.

T.I Unless you write the plays how can people see them?

S.I I am sure they will do so. Don't we know what they want?

F.I Now be done with it. Tell me plainly what kind of play they want.

People are heard shouting in the distance: 'He went in that direction' 'Catch him' etc.

F.I What is this noise? *(The shouting has stopped)*

S.I You are lucky Sir. You live on the outskirts of the city. You've at least this much quiet.

T.I Writers need a quiet place, don't they?

S.I Did you ask me something, Sir?

F.I Did I? what was it about? Do you remember?

S.I Ah yes. What kind of plays people liked to see Sir.

F.I Oh, forget it. When I've decided not to write a play why should I bother about what people want and what they don't? Let's go inside. You shouldn't leave without a cup of tea.

T.I You are clever Sir. We ask you for a play and you offer us tea.

F.I What's wrong with it? I am sure this is better than offering tea to the audience to trick them into seeing plays.

Meanwhile a police constable comes running from behind the house.

Who was that?

P.C Did you see any one running away?

F.I *(Smiling)* That was the only thing missing from our play.

P.C What did you say?

F.I. Nothing Sepoysaheb. What can we do for you?

P.O I want to know if you have seen any one running away.

T.I No one. You must have heard us talking.

P.C. *(Hears someone shouting 'Ah, here', crosses the stage, and makes his exit at the corner to the right of the audience.)*

T.I. Shall we go inside? We can talk there more comfortably.

S.I. *(With elderly authority)* Don't you remember he is a writer? We have no right to disturb him. After all what is there to talk? Let him think.

F.I Think? Think about what?

T.I About our play. What else?

F.I What play?

S.I Mythological play, Sir.

F.I What did you say?

S.I Listen to me Sir. People love mythological plays. Gods and demons; Rambha and Urvasi dancing in Indra's court!

F.I. Breaks into a loud laugh

T.I *(Seeing F.I laugh)* I don't understand you Sir.

F.I *(Checking his laughter)* Do you take me for a child? Gods, demons, miraculous feats–they would appeal to a child's mind. And you want me to write about them now at this age. What do you think? Do I live in the twentieth century or in the barbaric age? What will intelligent people say if I write plays with such stories?

T.I What do you mean Sir by 'Such stories'?

F.I I mean a story like this. You begin with a king or a *risi.* A demon enters the story. Kidnaps a woman. Battles, Curses, make--beliefs follow. I say, is there any connection between this and our life? Could such things have happened in any human society?

S.I That is why people come to see such plays, Sir.

F.I Damn it. What kind of an age was that when one could steal some one else's wife?

P.C. enters suddenly from the corner from which he had made his exit.

P.C. Sure. Did you see him?

F.I. *(Irritated)* Who?

P.C Didn't you say something about stealing someone else's wife?

S.I Sepoysaheb, he was telling the story of a play.

P.C *(Angrily)* If you want to tell stories go inside the house. You are obstructing serious work here.

T.I Why should we obstruct your work Sepoysaheb? What do you want from us?

P.C *(Authoritatively)* How often should I ask you whether you saw someone here?

S.I No. We didn't see anyone. We are sure about that.

P.C. But you were saying something about kidnapping a woman, weren't you?

S.I. Oh, that! That was the story of the play.

P.C. I've told you, if you want to tell stories, you should do it inside the house, not here.

P.C. remembers that he has already said this once and gets irritated and insulted

Remember, if you are hiding anything...

F.I *(In disgust)* Come, Let's go inside.

S.I. Right, what's the use of arguing with him?

T.I Let us fix something before we leave.

F.I. *(Ascending the steps and opening the door)* Wait for a minute. I'll light a lamp.

S.I. and T.I. stand with their backs to the door. Both are silent as though lost in thought. Meanwhile the man who had run away earlier

approaches from the cluster of trees. He moves silently behind S.I. and T.I. and enters the open door. S.I. and T.I hear the sound at the door, turn round and look at the house

S.I. I thought somebody shut the door. It worries me.

T.I He must be alone in the house. *(He sees a matchstick being struck inside the house)* Come. He has lit the lamp. *(Both enter the house.)*

F.I *(Comes upto the door and addresses the persons inside)* I'll just close the door or that silly policeman will ask us again, 'Did you see any one?'

There is silence on the stage for a few moments. Then slowly the door is partially opened and the man seen at the beginning of the play appears again. He is eagerly listening for sounds. He hears somebody talking in the distance and again disappears into the house. Meanwhile two villagers appear on the scene. They are talking to each other. The elder one is Mava (Uncle). The other one, younger but in his middle age is Malla (Dull one). Malla comes forward saying 'this is the spot.'*

MAVA *(Comes to the front and looks round)* This is the spot? What is there to see here? Somebody's house in front and this side an open ground.

MALLA Listen Mava. It seems the policeman came here.

MAVA Maybe. He must be on the night round and afraid to come later. So he must have come now.

MALLA No Mava. He came in search of that boy.

MAVA Take a breath Malla. What boy?

MALLA Our boy, Mava.

MAVA Why didn't you say so earlier? Your boy ran away with somebody's wife, didn't he?

MALLA *(Interrupting him)* Mava, I never said so. You were in a hurry and didn't hear me properly.

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* Names like Malla (Fool) Kalla (Stone), Tippi (Dunghill) are deliberately given. They work like magic protection. Mava is the usual form of addressing any elder. It means father-in-law but it need not always suggest blood relationship.

MAVA How can there be any hurry in hearing, Mallappa? Come, let's go. It's no use waiting here.

MALLA Shouldn't we try to find the boy?

MAVA What's wrong with you? You say the same things again and again. You told me your son had gone in search of his wife. How are you going to find him? That loose girl must have run away with her...

MALLA No, no, Mava. She hasn't gone with him willingly. She has been kidnapped by that *badmash*. I am certain.

MAVA No, listen Malla. Tell me the truth in Bhudevi's name. Did that *badmash* kidnap your daughter-in-law or has she run away with him?

MALLA Mava, it is the work of that *badmash*. We must find the boy.

MAVA What sort of a man is your boy? He wears a moustache and can't find another woman? Let that loose girl go.

MALLA You don't know mava. They really loved each other, my son and that girl.

MAVA Don't tell me. I know women. She loved your boy. Somebody else turned up. She loved him. Don't talk to me about love. Let's go.

MALLA *(Nervously)* Mava.

MAVA What is it now?

MALLA Mava, there is some other reason for my worrying.

MAVA Reason? What big reason is that?

MALLA I don't know. I'm worried our boy may kill that *badmash* in his fury. Can't you wait a minute Mava? I'll just look around among those trees.

MAVA Do you fear you'll find a dead body there?

MALLA *(Going in that direction)* That's where the boy used to sit. Both of them loved that spot.

MAVA *(Walking behind Malla)* Who knows? You may find them sitting there. Come. Let's find out.

Two young men enter from the right of the audience. One of them is Humba (a rash follow) and the other one is Shumbha (an idiot). 'Look Shumbha, they are here.' 'Yes Humba, it's them', they are saying to each other.

MAVA Who are these fellows now?

HUMBA I heard someone say there has been a murder here.

MALLA *(Frightened)* Murder? What murder? Whose?

SHUMBHA I don't know. That's what the policeman said.

MAVA So, you must have bought tickets to see the show.

HUMBA Ha, Ha! Very amusing.

MAVA Somebody murders someone, and it is fun for others. Idiots. Get out of here.

MALLA *(Frightened)* Mava, what are they saying? I am really worried.

MAVA You are a born fool. It is nothing but a roadside rumour.

SHUMBHA *(Addressing Humba)* Did you hear that? They think it is just a rumour.

HUMBA No Mava, it is not a rumour....

MAVA *(Interrupting him)* Look, who are you calling 'Mava'?

HUMBA *(Just to show that he is not afraid of him)* This is not a rumour. We have it from the police constable.

MALLA *(Eagerly)* What did he tell you?

SHUMBHA *(To Humba)* Shall we tell him?

HUMBA No, we shouldn't. The police may went to keep it a secret.

MALLA *(Shaken)* No, no. We will not tell it to any one.

HUMBA Why should we tell them? I know this lot. They commit murder and...

MAVA Now don't talk without knowing the facts. Do you want to be arrested by the police?

SHUMBHA Why will the police arrest him? It is the husband who has committed murder.

MALLA *(Frightened further)* Whose husband?

SHUMBHA & HUMBA *(Laughing)* Look, he wants to know whose husband it is! Ha! Ha! Whose else? The wife's. The wife's husband! Ha! Ha! *(They go away laughing)*

MALLA *(Wiping the sweat from his face)* Mava...

MAVA *(Angry)* Keep quiet. Don't you see? This is how people build stories.

MALLA *(Checking)* This boy has already killed that *badmash.*

MAVA I hope he has killed that loose woman too.

MALLA Mava...

MAVA What's wrong with you? Why are you mewing like a cat, Mava, Mava? You and your son. The same lot. If she runs away your boy must be man enough to bring her back. And you say he loves her!

MALLA You don't understand Mava. They really loved each other. You don't know. They wanted to kill themselves if they were not allowed to marry. They are so fond of each other, Mava.

MAVA Do you want me to go on listening to your stories or...

MALLA No Mava. Let's go. Let's search all the places. That *Badmash* must have kept her somewhere bound hand and foot. And our boy must be searching for her.

MAVA And the policeman? He has gone in search of your son?

MALLA No Mava. My boy is innocent. It's four days since he had food or sleep.

MAVA I talk about the police and you talk as if you are reporting to a doctor. Look, there is someone there. (He points to the backside of the house. The policeman enters with a citizen)

CITIZEN *(To the P.C.)* This is the spot I told you about.

P.C. You told me? I thought you were told about it by some-one else.

CITIZEN That's it. I told you that I was told about it. I was standing here. Suddenly I heard some sound from that direction like 'Gook'. You know the kind of sound you produce when something chokes you in the throat.

P.C From what direction, did you say?

CITIZEN Do you see those trees? There.

P.C. *(Looks in that direction and catches sight of Mava and Malla. Taken aback)* What is this? Who are you?

MAVA *(Coming forward)* We were trying to find you, Sepoysaheb.

P.C. Find me?

MAVA I'll tell you what has happened, Sepoysaheb. This is Malla. His son has been missing.

P.C. *(Angry)* Get out of here. Go to the police station if you have a complaint to lodge. *(Turning to the Citizen)* Yes. What did you say? Tell me what happened next.

CITIZEN I have told you. I heard this sound 'gook.' *(Exactly at that moment the hooting of an owl is heard. All of them are taken aback and stand motionless)*

MAVA Wasn't it an owl hooting?

MAVA What else? Were you expecting a cuckoo to sing at this time of the night?

P.C *(To the Citizen)* This is what you must have heard.

CITIZEN Not at all. I heard someone crying 'Ayyo!' I am sure the owl cannot produce that sound.

P.C. Do you really mean it?

CITIZEN *(Impressed by the importance of his own words)* Sure. I heard this sound 'Ayyo' clearly, and then a woman screaming 'Don't, don't.'

P.C. Are you sure that all this happened within your hearing?

CITIZEN What do you mean? I was here exactly on this spot and I heard the sounds coming from that direction *(Points out with his hand).*

MALLA *(Almost on the verge of collapse)* From what direction, Sir?

CITIZEN Do you see those trees there? From that direction. I am certain, Constable, there must be a dead body there.

MALLA Whose dead body? *(He is frightened)*

CITIZEN Not one. Two dead bodies.

MAVA Look Malla. Your son and your daughter-in-law must have gone there to enjoy themselves.

P.C. *(Turning to Mava and Malla)* Who are you? Why are you here at this time?

CITIZEN We should leave now. Who knows we might get beaten up. People lose control over themselves.

P.C. Who? Who will get beaten?

CITIZEN Constable, you don't believe me. But people do lose control over themselves in such situations. That young fellow is not in his senses. I hear he has been threatening to kill both of them.

MALLA *(Frightened)* My son never said that Sir. He is not like that.

P.C *(Suddenly)* So, he is your son.

CITIZEN *(Surprised)* You are related to him? Constable, don't allow them to escape. There must be a dead body there among the trees. You must look for it.

MALLA *(Almost shouting)* Mava.

MAVA *(To the Citizen)* You must be really in love with dead bodies.

CITIZEN What do you mean?

MAVA You are trying to find dead bodies where there are none. That's what I mean.

CITIZEN *(With a superior laugh)* You won't understand such things. This man--woman affair can be very dangerous. Haven't you heard what happened to Lanka? The whole city was burnt. That should give you an idea of how cruel men can be where a woman is involved.

P.C. I don't care for your stories. Tell me what you saw.

CITIZEN I have already told you that. I heard a woman screaming. And then nothing. Neither the man's voice nor the woman's. That's why I say the two dead bodies....

P.C You are just repeating yourself. Are you suggesting that the dead bodies got up and walked away? *(Hearing the sound of a door opening)* What's that?

CITIZEN So you also heard it?

MALLA What is that Mava? *(The sound of somebody coughing)*

P.C. *(In a threatening voice)* Who is that?

The three Individuals come out of the house, and one of them asks, 'Why? Who are you?'

F.I *(Catching sight of P.C)* You seem to be haunting my house. Do you want us to get some sleep or not?

CITIZEN This is your house? You want to go to sleep? With two dead bodies lying close to you. Very decent thing to do, I am sure.

S.I Dead bodies, did you say?

T.I What are they doing here?

P.C. *(To Citizen)* Will you keep quiet for a minute? *(To F.I)* Rayare, I have asked you several times and I am asking you again. Have you seen any one?

F.I. *(Treating this as a joke)* Well, who did you want me to see? (Laughs)

CITIZEN You are laughing? You should have seen the thing with your own eyes. There has been a murder here, murder!

T.I *(Unable to understand him)* What are you saying?

CITIZEN A sensational event! Sex! Murder!

P.C *(To Citizen)* Why don't you be quiet? *(To the Individuals)* That's why I am asking you if you have seen any one. You see, this has happened close to your house.

S.I Look, Sepoysaheb. He is a writer. He keeps aloof. Doesn't notice any thing except his table and chair, pen and paper.

P.C. *(Irritated)* Why are you telling me all these stories? Just say you haven't seen anyone. Just because you are not on oath, do you think you can get away with anything? It is a truth to hide the crime... I mean a crime to hide the truth... from an officer *(more aggressively to hide his slip)* I say remember this. *(Makes his exit from behind the house).*

CITIZEN Look. He's gone. *(Following him)* Constable, what are you doing about the dead bodies?

MALLA Mava, he is still talking about dead bodies. I hope my boy hasn't really....

MAVA Come, come. Let's go now. The dead should take care of their bodies. You say your son and daughter-in-law love each other. If that is so, your boy hasn't killed anyone, and he is not dead. I haven't had a smoke for hours. Come, let's go home *(They leave the scene, taking the same way they came. The three Individuals look at each other. Then)*

F.I *(As though he had nothing to do with what has happened so far)* Did you see for yourself? These are the people you have been talking about. They care more about their pipes than about mythological plays.

(The three of them reach the end of the stage to the right of the audience as they talk)

T.I You have made up your mind to disagree with us. What can we do about it?

S.I You are a man of superior knowledge. We are helpless. *(The door opens and the face seen at the beginning of the play appears again.)*

S.I It is enough for us if the story is mythological. You can do whatever you want with it.

F.I What do you mean? Do you want me to show Ravana taking off his hat and smoking?

T.I Ha! Ha! Ha!

S.I *(Stops walking and fixes his attention on F.I)* Did you say something? Oh, yes, I remember now. Oblige us just once. Write a mythological play as we want it... I mean... as you want it... And if you don't collect money enough to raise a high compound wall around your house...

T.I ... We will give up our profession.

S.I You said profession? *(Suddenly remembering)* Oh, I've left my bag inside.

T.I I've left mine too.

(When S.I. and T.I both turn towards the door, the door closes and the face disappears.)

F.I *(With a laugh)* Come, then. I don't want those bags in my house. The policeman will surely come again and ask me, 'Have you seen any one here?' And when he sees the bags he will think I have...

T.I Ha! Ha! Ha!

As all the three walk towards the door

The Curtain
End of Act One

ACT TWO

Setting as in Act I. Time, the same night. Two hours after the incidents of the first Act. The moon is shining more brightly. The darkness seen through the window of the house offers a contrast to the moonlight. Deep on the right, thick shadow of the trees... As the curtain goes up, silence everywhere. No one in sight... The hooting of an owl is heard, as in the earlier Act... Then silence... After a few seconds, the Police Constable walks in slowly, looks around and moves to the centre of the stage. He takes out a couple of letters from his pocket, scrutinises them and, turning to the house, fixes his gaze on it. Then gradually he turns his back towards the audience and divides his attention between the house and the dark trees. He pockets the letters, walks a few steps towards the house, stops for a moment, throws up his hands and walks away in the direction of his entry... More silence... Then from the right is heard the honking of a car horn. Now enters a driver in uniform from front right of the stage, shaking the dust off his clothes. A woman fashionably dressed follows him, brushing her hair. As they look at each other anxiously, the car honks again. Unhappy and frustrated by the sound, the couple exchange looks and walk away towards the trees. There is silence on the stage now. A few seconds pass and a light appears in the window. The door opens and the Second and Third Individuals come out. The light disappears from the window. The First Individual also comes out. He crosses the threshold and looks around. The Third Individual with a bag in his hand stands below him on the lowest step and the Second Individual with the stick in hand waits on the step just above him.

F.I Wow! I've never seen such moonlight.

S.I You don't have lights in the house even by mistake, do you Sir?

T.I Enough for a writer to have light where he writes. Am I right, Sir?

F.I. You are right. Why do I need more light?

S.I *(Going down the steps)* We will give you plenty of light, Sir, if you will write for us...

S.I *(Taking a step further)* Wait, I'm thinking of something else.

S.I I too.

F.I Then let's walk your thought.

T.I *(Takes it to be a joke and laughs)* Walk the thought? Ha, ha.

F.I Look. Thoughts are like pet dogs. They don't trouble the owner but bark at strangers. What do you say? *(Stops on the first step).*

S.I We have to get moving Sir. It's getting late. But I have a last request to make, if you don't mind.

T.I That would be my request too.

F.I Ask me anything except writing plays.

S.I But Sir, you have earned a name writing plays. And we are experienced actors and producers.

F.I *(Interrupting)* That is exactly my point.

S.I *(Surprised)* I don't understand you Sir.

F.I What I have earned is name. And what you have earned is experience. For both of us there has been no contact with money.

T.I Don't say so. There is money. We have come to tell you about it.

F.I I've told you I will not write mythological plays.

S.I Then write historical plays.

F.I *(Surprised)* What?

T.I *(About to take a step forward, stops)* Now you are caught, aren't you? Write historical plays if you are against mythologicals.

F.I *(Surprised again, looks at the T.I who nods his head. All the three have now moved to the centre of the stage. As though he says this to himself)* Are you saying that historical plays are not mythological?

T.I *(Treats this as a joke and laughs)* Oh! You think they are the same.

F.I *(To himself again)* Are you saying they are the same?

S.I Why should we not be clear and straight when we are talking among ourselves? If you ask me, they are the same. Depends on how you look at them. That is why I am so confident that audiences will be attracted.

T.I *(To the F.I)* Listen to us. We are experienced people.

F.I *(Laughs)* Where does experience come in here? Both are the same because both tell lies. *(The T.I. is about to laugh but stops as he senses disapproval in the S.I. To the S.I.)* You don't seem to agree.

S.I I neither agree nor disagree. Why should we bother about truth or untruth? Write historical plays. I guarantee audiences will come to see them.

T.I And I guarantee dazzling costumes.

S.I Have both in the play, deep scenes and front scenes. I'll arrange for breath-taking settings.

T.I That's our promise. You have assurances from both of us.

S.I If you like, you may add fighting scenes and court scenes as well.

T.I Court scenes are better. Then we can arrange for dances.

S.I The princess will sing from the balcony of a bedroom in the palace. The Prince will sing from below.

T.I *(Overwhelmed by enthusiasm)* Wonderful! She will sing from above and he will sing from below. A musical duel!

S.I *(To the F.I)* What do you say, Sir?

T.I *(Egging him on)* What more can we say?

F.I What would be the story like? You could tell me that as well.

S.I Story? You can have any story you like Sir. But it must have one particular scene.

F.I *(Pretending interest)* What is that?

S.I *(To the T.I)* Why don't you tell us?

T.I *(Nodding his head enthusiastically)* I know. I definitely know. That scene has got to be there.

F.I I have been asking you. What is that scene?

S.I *(Explains in detail. Actions follow his words.)* Listen. *(To the T.I.)* Come here. *(Takes him to the centre of the backstage)* Deep scene, upto this point. The king. Advanced in age. His son. A handsome young man. The queen. That is, the prince's step-mother. She is in love with the prince. She wants both--the kingdom and love. *(To the T.I.)* Now close your eyes. *(He does so)* The king, an old man, is asleep. The queen approaches him, slowly. She is determined to kill him *(Takes a few steps towards the 'king')* But she is afraid but thinks of the handsome prince. Takes courage and moves forward. If she commits the murder, it is sin. If she doesn't, she loses her love. Both ways, danger. No, she says to herself and takes another step. Not double danger, but doubled happiness, she tells herself. She can claim the throne when the king is dead. And she can have her lover too. Double happiness she tells herself again. I will kill the king. So...

P.C *(Appearing from behind the house)* Where is she?... I have found her.

The other three are taken by surprise

P.C *(Removes some letters from his pocket)* Have you also received this letter?

S.I Which letter?

P.C Didn't you say she has killed her aged husband?

S.I *(Laughs)* Sepoysaheb, I was narrating the story of the play. I am running a theatrical company. *(Pointing at the T.I.)* He is our manager. *(Points to the F.I)* And he writes plays for us.

P.C *(As though remembering something, approaches the F.I.)* You write plays?

F.I *(Annoyed)* Why do you want to know? We have had to get your permission to stage plays till now but now it seems we need your permission to write plays as well.

P.C *(Ignoring him)* Is this your house?

T.I *(Moving to front stage)* Certainly. We have come here to discuss a new play with him. It is his house. He is the owner.

F.I *(Disgusted)* Are you investigating how someone could build a house from writing plays? My father built this house not I... Tell him.

P.C *(Ignoring him)* So, this is the place. *(Slaps his hand across the letters)*

S.I *(Confused)* This is the place?

P.C *(Stares at S.I)* So, you know too?

T.I What? What does he know?

P.C *(To the F.I)* So this is your house? So you would know if a woman was seen moving about here?

F.I *(Controlling his anger)* I don't look at passing women. It is not my nature.

P.C No need to get angry, Sir. I didn't say you were looking for women. I just wanted to know if you have seen a woman.

S.I *(Gently)* Sepoysaheb, didn't I tell you he is a writer of plays?

P.C Are you suggesting he can't distinguish between men and women?

F.I *(Angry)* I have heard enough. I have been watching you since evening. You have been loitering about here.

P.C. We go wherever duty calls us.

F.I *(Still angry)* Disrupting our discussions. Is this also part of your duty?

P.C *(To S.I and T.I)* Look here, I am a policeman on duty, as you can see. If you obstruct me...

S.I *(Together)* No, no, we have no such thought.

P.C *(In a tone of authority)* All right, for once I trust you. But I suspect you are trying to hide something from me, I tell you. I have received this letter *(Shows it to them and puts it back in his pocket)*. I am warning you, it will not be good for you if you conceal anything *(Walks away with authoritative steps)*

S.I and T.I look at each other

S.I *(To F.I)* we shouldn't have carried this on in the open. It is our fault. We have caused you trouble.

F.I Trouble? No. It is the duty of these policemen to save us from trouble. But they themselves are causing it. That is why I was angry.

S.I Let that go. I'll tell you my ideas when I meet you tomorrow.

T.I All three of us are here now and you are in such great form. You could as well complete narrating that scene.

S.I You want me to do it here?

T.I No, let us go in.

S.I But we shouldn't trouble him again.

F.I No trouble at all if you ask me.

S.I Are you sure?

T.I *(Has already started walking towards the house)* We won't take long. Who knows? He might even sit down and dash off the play.

S.I I would not like to rush him.

T.I Why should we rush him? If he takes it into his mind his mind would do it for us. What do you say, Sir? *(Laughs)*

F.I Let us go in. At least it will save us from seeing the policeman's face again.

They open the door and enter. The T.I who brings up the rear closes the door behind him.

Silence. Enter after a few seconds, the Driver and the Young Woman. The Young Woman's face shows deep dissatisfaction. And anger. They speak to each other in whispers.

Y.W *(Taunting)* Why don't you admit you've no courage?

DRIVER Courage? Courage for what?

Y.W You don't know?

DRIVER I don't. That's why I am asking you.

Y.W So, you are bent on making me say it. Courage for what? You ask me. How often haven't I told you? I am fed up with this life of stealth.

DRIVER Where is stealing in this?

Y.W Isn't this stealing? We have to worry all the time that the old man doesn't see us, doesn't hear us.

DRIVER *(Interrupting)* What do you mean? After all he is your husband.

Y.W *(Stamping her foot)* Husband! Husband! Who wants him?

DRIVER I am not saying you want him. Look here, he is your husband. So, you are his wife.

Y.W *(About to break into tears)* Stick, stick your poisonous arrows into me.

DRIVER *(Consoling her)* Don't be silly. Why should I hurt you? You know what a miser your husband is. Several people have offered me jobs, but did I go? You know why I can't go.

Y.W That is what I am saying. When we love each other...

DRIVER *(Interrupting)* But what is there to obstruct us now?

Y.W What more do you expect? You've seen for yourself. We hadn't spent even a few minutes together when he sounded the horn to call you. You know why. You've heard him yourself. He wants us to help him walk. Doesn't have even the strength to stand on his legs. When I put my hands under

his arms to raise him I feel that his hands would come off the body. So worn out is he. But he says he wants to walk. You know that is a lie. He is just suspicious about us.

DRIVER *(Interrupting)* Let him have his suspicions. He will not be able to digest them. They might even kill him.

Y.W He will never die on his own.

DRIVER *(Smiling)* Never die? How long is he going to live?

Y.W *(Frustrated)* How does it matter whether he lives or dies when we ourselves cease to be young?

DRIVER He is more useful to us living..

Y.W *(Surprised)* What did you say? More useful to us living?

DRIVER Yes, that's what I said.

Y.W *(Stares at him and breathes a sign of disgust)* I knew it. But I didn't know you were such a coward.

DRIVER Does it need a brave man to kill an old man like him?

Y.W Let us see whether you are brave or cowardly.

DRIVER This is a matter of intelligence, not one of bravery or cowardice.

Y.W Curse on intelligence! What intelligence is there in living with an old husband?

DRIVER *(Smiling)* Who has bound you to that kind of life?

Y.W Then why don't you agree?

DRIVER Agree to what?

Y.W *(Angrily)* You have gone back to the beginning.

DRIVER Look at her. Listen to me. We are not short of anything. No one can come between us. Your husband may be old but he is wealthy.

Y.W You will be getting that wealth. Do you want me or are you afraid that you will lose the wealth?

DRIVER I want you. And I want your husband's money. Isn't it better to have both?

Y.W *(Obstinately)* No, no, no. I want happiness. I want love in marriage. I wouldn't mind poverty.

DRIVER *(Coaxing)* But listen to me.

Y.W No, I will not listen to you. I can no longer put up with this false life. If you can't do it, then I... *(Turns to the right and prepares to leave)*

DRIVER *(Stopping her)* What are you going to do?

Y.W *(In contempt, freeing herself from him)* I shall do what a man like you cannot do. Do you have the courage to accept it at least?

DRIVER Stop! Stop! Don't be rash. People have already begun to suspect us.

Y.W Suspect whom?

DRIVER Both of us.

Y.W That's why I said enough of this life of stealth.

DRIVER I wasn't talking about that.

Y.W *(Confused)* Then what?

DRIVER I was talking about the old man. Suppose we kill him for some reason.

Y.W Look, even outsiders can see that, but you are still...

DRIVER *(Interrupting)* Are you mad? People have suspicions about us. They have written to the police about it.

Y.W *(With a smile of secrecy)* How do you say that others have written those letters?

DRIVER Then who would write them? I?

Y.W Why not?

DRIVER Don't talk nonsense. Why should I or you write such letters?

Y.W. How do you know that I haven't written?

DRIVER *(Confused)* What? You? You would suspect yourself and...

Y.W *(Interrupting)* Why should I suspect myself?

DRIVER Then suspect me?

Y.W *(Insinuatingly)* Why not?

DRIVER Oh! Is that so? *(Prepares to leave)*

Y.W *(Stopping him, frightened)* What is this? Where are you going?

DRIVER To join my master who pays me my salary.

The young woman, about to follow him, stops suddenly. She is unable to suppress her tears and bites her lips. She hears a confusing sound emerging from behind the house and makes her exit from the right.

After a few seconds the Citizen and closely following him the Police Constable make their appearance

CITIZEN *(To the P.C.)* This is the spot.

P.C Never mind the spot. I want to know who you are. You came to me this evening and told me lots of things.

CITIZEN *(Interrupting him)* You want to know who I am? I am a citizen, citizen of free Bharat, where all are equal. Now does it matter who I am?

P.C Don't lecture to me... Give me a straight answer. You want to know why I want to know who you are? You look like the kind of guy who would do things like this. That's why.

CITIZEN *(Insulted)* What do you mean by 'Such things'

P.C. What else? Are you aware what you did this evening?

CITIZEN What did I do?

P.C. You told me someone had run away with someone else's wife. And you said that the husband had murdered his wife and her lover in a fit of anger and you would show me the dead body.

CITIZEN Yes, but how could I know that the murderer had concealed the body?

P.C The murderer has not been found.

CITIZEN Did you find the dead body?

P.C I found a body but it was living.

CITIZEN What is this? Is murder a matter of joke for you?

P.C. Be off. You are a mad fellow. You talk of murder! The wife has gone to her parents' home and the husband has gone there to bring her back. Meanwhile somebody has spread a rumour about murder. Poor fellow! The husband was frightened when he heard this and he has disappeared. That is why I want to know whether this rumour is also of the same kind.

CITIZEN This is no rumour. Look, I have received this letter.

P.C I have seen it. I too have a similar letter. Like your letter it too has no signature. The same person seems to have written both the letters.

CITIZEN Surprising! Police on point duty seem to have turned detectives.

P.C Don't worry about that. Answer my question.

CITIZEN What question?

P.C This letter says that an old man is going to be killed by his young wife at this place. How did you come to know about it?

CITIZEN Through this letter.

P.C. The letter was written then and the murder is taking place now.

CITIZEN Who knows? The murder may have already been committed. The body may be rotting now.

P.C What do you mean? Do you think this place belongs to dead bodies?

CITIZEN If all policemen are like you who can say how many dead bodies may be found?

P.C Look here. I am telling you. Don't write such letters again. Someday you will find yourself in trouble.

CITIZEN Let it be. The woman who has killed her rich husband will not be short of money to save herself. But I am a citizen. It is my duty to speak. The rich man is going to be killed.

P.C *(Pushing him away)* Go away. I know what your duty is. Talking about murders and dead bodies.

CITIZEN Constable, I am telling you.

P.C Don't tell me. Go home and tell this story to your wife and children. They would perhaps lap it up.

CITIZEN *(He is not seen now but his voice continues to be heard.)* This is no story, Constable. She is going to get her husband killed by her driver.

P.C Why, did you think she would ask you to do the job? Go. Go.

Exit both

Silence for a second. Then the door opens slowly. The face seen in Act I is half visible. The hooting of an owl. The Young Woman enters calling 'Driver! Driver!' The face disappears. Door closes

Y.W Driver! Driver! *(The Driver makes a quiet appearance and the Young Woman is taken aback.)* Oh! How frightened I was. *(The Driver does not say anything. The Young Woman stares at him. The look of cruel determination on his face frightens her.)* Why? What has happened?

DRIVER *(Harshly)* You are asking me? As if you don't know what has happened.

Y.W *(Confused)* What? I don't know what has happened.

DRIVER You've done the deed and you want to get me into trouble, do you? *(In a threatening voice)* Tell me. Tell me. Why did you do this when I had asked you not to do it?

Y.W *(Still confused)* What have I done? *(He looks at her with cruel eyes)* Tell me, please. What has happened? To Whom?

DRIVER *(In desperation)* Oh! My master!

Y.W *(Interrupting)* What did he say? Does he know about us? Has he dismissed you from service?

DRIVER *(As though he has not heard these words)* My master! Your husband!

Y.W *(Angry)* You taunt me again.

DRIVER *(Casting a sharp glance at her)* You are not a woman. You are a *rakshasi*. Now I know why you have been talking to me this way.

Y.W How did I talk?

DRIVER *(In a threatening voice)* Shut up. I lack courage? I am a coward? Do you think killing an old husband makes you a brave woman?

Y.W Killing whom?

DRIVER Who else? Your husband.

Y.W *(Suddenly relieved)* Is he dead? Is this true? Tell me. Tell me.

He looks at her in astonishment. She stares at him. Her face expands in smile. She embraces him.

Y.W My hero! My brave hero! You are my...

DRIVER *(Freeing himself from her hurriedly)* Don't come near me.

Y.W *(Stares at him. Beaming)* Stop this play-acting. There's no need to get frightened. I'll not tell anyone. Why should I? It's all smooth sailing for us now, It does not matter who else is ruined, who dies. I'll not open my lips.

DRIVER *(Baffled)* You'll not tell anyone? What's that?

Y.W I called you a coward. I must have been mad.

DRIVER *(More baffled)* What? What are you saying?

Y.W Whatever I want to say I'll say it to myself. No one else will know. But you shouldn't have been so cruel.

DRIVER Cruel? Me cruel? What do you mean?

Y.W *(In a complaining voice)* Wasn't it cruel? When I pleaded with you in so many ways, you pretended not to yield. You called him your master, your food--giver and went away to join him. I misunderstood you and was frightened. You didn't give me even a clue about why you went in search of him. Wasn't that cruel?

DRIVER *(Scared)* What is this? Just because you are rich, should you blame me for the crime? I swear, I haven't even touched him. Listen to me. When I went to see him he was already dead.

Y.W I'll also say the same thing, don't worry.

DRIVER *(Pleading)* What will you say?

Y.W Be quiet. Someone is approaching. Look... This side... It is a policeman. *(Moves towards the door)* Come here.

She leads him to the steps leading to the house.

The Citizen appears from behind the house.

CITIZEN Did you hear, Constable? The car is somewhere here.

The Young Woman pulls the Driver into the house and closes the door.

CITIZEN At least now, do you believe me?

P.C The car may have come this side. But that means nothing.

CITIZEN I am told both of them are there in the car- the Driver and the Young Woman.

P.C Does it mean that a murder has already taken place? Isn't it possible that the Driver was driving the couple somewhere?

CITIZEN If that were all, who would have paid attention to it?

P.C Are you suggesting that if they knew it was murder, people would have paid money to see it?

CITIZEN Look here, Constable. Who am I to suggest this or that? I was commenting on the nature of people. I am absolutely certain that when a rumour like this is spread, *(Suddenly looks to his left)* Look there. Don't you see something shining in the moonlight?

P.C *(Moves up and looks)* What is that?

CITIZEN *(Triumphant)* Look, Constable, it is a car. What did I tell you? *(Rushes towards the cluster of trees and disappears.)*

P.C *(Grumbling)* Is he trying to fool me with his play-acting or does he have a black tongue?

CITIZEN *(Shouting off stage)* Constable, Constable. Look. The old man's body. He is dead. You should call the doctor to make sure.

P.C *(Not understanding him)* What? Is it really a dead body? *(Moves in that direction.)* This fellow is probably going to celebrate the event, if it is a murder. *(Leaves the stage in a hurry)*

The sound of a car horn from the direction of the trees. Then silence. After a few seconds the door opens and the three Individuals come out.

S.I Didn't I tell you? The husband-killing scene never fails on the stage.

F.I But what about the husbands and wives watching the play? Will they keep quiet?

S.I But we would have announced before hand that they were watching a historical play.

T.I Besides they would be knowing that what they would be seeing is not true.

F.I Not true? Of course, they know it is not true. We know it is not true. So, you are suggesting that I should write what is not true.

T.I *(Correcting himself)* No, no. Not in that sense. What I was saying was that the actors do not die. No one really dies in a play. *(Sees the P.C. approaching and stops. P.C. looks at them in suspicion.)*

P.C Tell me one thing.

F.I We haven't seen anyone.

S.I We were discussing a play.

T.I Yes, yes. You heard us just now.

P.C I have heard it. That is why I am asking you this question.

T.I Heard what?

P.C Were you discussing a play or acting one?

F.I What do you mean?

S.I *(Smiling)* What a question, Constable. How can anyone stage a play here?

P.C *(Thoughtfully)* You may deny that. But it has happened without your help.

T.I What has happened without our help?

P.C The play.

F.I Sheer madness!

P.C Not yet. But if it goes on like this, there is no escape from it. So, I am asking you for the last time. Tell me on oath. Did you see any woman passing by?

F.I *(Unable to control himself)* No, no, no. *(Turning to the other Individuals)* What kind of trouble is this? Let us go and sit inside to escape from these meddling policemen. *(Leads the other two into the house and closes the door)* Sheer madness!

P.C. is speechless for a second and then removes his helmet and scratches his head.

P.C Who knows? It may be just madness. I listened to everyone, called a doctor who was passing by and told him it was a

case of murder. He too said I was mad. It was a case of heart failure, he said. *(Heaves a long sigh and mutters to himself)* Any thing is possible in this moonlight. *(He drags his feet away tired, and disappears behind the house. His words 'Any thing is possi ble' are heard as the curtain falls.)*

End of Act II

ACT THREE

Scene as before. Two or two and a half hours after the incidents of the last Act. The moonlight is now as bright as day. But, as before, darkness in the house and in the cluster of trees. Since the moon is high up in the sky, the spread of moonlight is small but thick. The darkness is as effective as light. After a few moments enter from the right of the audience a young man and a young woman. There is an absent look in their faces as they move from the front of the stage to the back. After they make their exit, the Citizen peeps from behind the house. His eyes are fixed on the couple. There is now a look of relief and joy in his face. After a few seconds the Citizen comes forward, takes out a letter from his pocket, puts it on a spot backstage, places a small stone on it, rubs his hands in satisfaction, looks at the cluster of trees and silently disappears behind the house.

Silence for a few seconds. Then the door opens slowly and the three Individuals come out. They have been talking. For some reason, the F.I.'s brows are knit. The other two are smiling. All of them walk to centre stage.

S.I *(Addressing the F.I)* What are you thinking about Sir? Tell us.

T.I Didn't I tell you? If he takes it into his mind, his mind will compel him to act?

S.I *(To the T.I)* Is that true? Is a play unfolding in your mind?

F.I *(With a sigh)* No. After having heard you and seen what you showed me, I am convinced that my decision has been right.

S.I *(Suspiciously)* What is that?

F.I The decision not to write a play.

T.I *(Hurt)* What are you saying Sir?

F.I *(Raises his hand and stops him)* Stop! Stop! Listen to me. *(Looks around)* Are you sure that the policeman is not around?

T.I *(Laughs, treating this as a joke)* I say, you should make him a character in your play.

F.I *(Sighs)* As I go on listening to you I feel more and more sure that I have been right in my decision.

S.I *(Makes a sign to the T.I asking him to keep quiet)* Sir, have your full say but leave it to me to convince you.

F.I *(Shaking his head)* No, no... No one can do it... Something has gone wrong at the source itself... Our social structure is wrong... The foundation of our culture is wrong. Our views on literature are wrong. Our...

T.I *(Interrupting)* Go ahead. We admit all those things are wrong.

F.I *(Disturbed in his thought)* What? What did you say?

S.I *(Hurriedly)* Finish what you have to say.

F.I *(Surprised)* What I want to say! What was I saying?

T.I *(Dramatically to the S.I. in a whisper)* He is getting inspiration. It is rising.

F.I *(Ignoring him)* Yes. I said my decision was right. *(The other two look at him in astonishment)* Why? Are you surprised to hear this? Look here, all this time you tried to put a spell on me by your narratives and by your examples. I have heard it all. Do you know what I felt then?

T.I Fair enough. You must have felt something.

S.I I'll be glad if my words have had any effect on you.

F.I Certainly they have had an effect. But what effect? I told myself as I went on listening to you, 'Well, you called yourself a dramatist and wrote plays. But what is a play?' Suddenly the answer came to me in a flash.

T.I *(Satisfied)* I knew. That is why I said, 'It may take some time but we should show him... *(Stops as the F.I. makes a furious sign.)*

F.I Wait, wait. I told you I had the answer. And what was that? A play is nothing but a set of convenient scenes from the producer's point of view.

T.I *(Claps his hands)* You are right, you are right. *(Suddenly remembering)* I have left my bag behind *(Stops as the S.I pinches him)*

S.I *(To the F.I)* Yes, the answer flashed on your mind. Next?

F.I *(Helpless)* Nothing. Your play and mine are different from each other.

S.I No, no. Why should you think like that? We will produce the play you write for us.

S.I We told you what kind of scenes we want. That is all. You may put anything you want in the scenes.

T.I The play will be staged exactly as you write it.

F.I *(Fixes his gaze on them and smiles)* I now understand why you have been so successful in your business. Really, you are very clever.

S.I It is not cleverness Sir, it is experience.

T.I It is the people who write the plays who are clever.

F.I So, you want to flatter me and make me dance to your tune, do you?

T.I *(As though they are polluted by these words)* No, no, no.

F.I *(Laughs)* You said I could write a mythological play. And what would be the scene? Molestation of a woman's modesty by a *rakshasa.* I could write historical plays, you said. And what is the scene? A woman kills her husband and violates her own modesty. It's really funny.

S.I But it is woman's virtue that triumphs in the end.

T.I And the villains die.

F.I *(Interrupting)* And you don't want me to forget that, don't you? That is why I said our plays, yours and mine, are different from each other.

S.I *(Fails to understand the distinction)* So?

F.I So what? Why should a woman's virtue win?

BOTH *(Thunderstruck)* Sir, What are you saying?

F.I I said, why should a woman's virtue be victorious? Suppose the woman herself does not want that to happen?

S.I No, no. How can that be?

F.I *(Continuing)* If she herself doesn't want it, why should we insist that she should win and rot in an unwanted marriage?

S.I But sir, this idea, this argument does not go with our culture, with the best of our women.

F.I *(Interrupting)* They may be the best, but they are women, Isn't that so? Go anywhere in the world, a woman is a woman.

(The T.I breaks into laughter. F.I., disappointed, looks at him with displeasure.)

T.I *(Controlling his laughter)* Now I understand. You are trying to scare us with your ideas. *(Laughs)*

S.I *(Laughs, as though he has just come out of danger)* I was so taken in by your words *(Laughs again)*

F.I So, you think the play will be a comedy if the woman's virtue does not win?

T.I *(Treats this also as a joke)* What? What did you say? Comedy? What is that?

S.I *(Trying to settle the argument)* Let that go Sir, It seems you are against mythological and historical plays. But we don't insist on any particular kind of play. We must have a play from you, that is all.

T.I And I agree. If you prefer writing a social play, go ahead by all means. *(Looking at the S.I)* We will produce that. Are you happy now?

F.I *(With a mischievous smile)* Okay. Tell me. How would you like to have marriage relationships in that play?

T.I *(Taken by surprise)* What? *(Exchanges glances with the S.I. and then to F.I)* Oh! now that you ask me *(Looking at the S.I)* Shall I tell him?

F.I *(Looking around)* Shall we go in?

S.I We wouldn't like to trouble you so much Sir, Who are we to tell you? And what can we tell you that you already don't know?

F.I *(Thoughtfully)* But you have experience. And I want to be clear about what you think.

T.I We speak because you have asked us to speak.

S.I Look Sir. What you have asked about the husband and wife scene is perfectly in order. After all this is a social play. There won't be gorgeous settings and costumes. I feel you should bring in poverty and love.

F.I *(Really impressed)* Poverty and love! What would be their relationship? Oh! I understand. The husband should be poor and the wife loving.

T.I *(Laughs)* No, no Sir. You got it wrong. Listen to me carefully.

F.I *(To the S.I)* I got it wrong?

S.I *(With a superior smile)* You are on the right track. You are right. The husband would be poor, actually he is born rich and not born poor. The girl is born poor. Besides, she is an orphan. And the boy falls in love with her. The boy's father opposes the marriage and threatens to throw him out of the house if he goes ahead with it. The boy doesn't listen to him. He goes through the marriage.

T.I The father is adamant. He asks his son to get out of his house.

S.I *(Angry with the T.I for interrupting him and more insistent)* The scene follows now. *(To the T.I)* Go and relax somewhere. *(The T.I. retreats backstage and lies down. (To the F.I)* Let us suppose he is the wife. Do you know why she is lying down there? *(F.I Shakes his head)* For eight days, eight days and eight nights, for one hundred and ninety two hours she hasn't had a morsel of food. For eight days the husband has tried to

get work and on the eighth day he returns home. *(He acts out the rest)* And what does he see? His beloved wife in a bad state. The lotus of his family--pond has faded and dried up. How much more does she, the golden heart of my bird *(Correcting himself)* the golden bird of my heart, have to endure? There is only one way to put an end to her suffering, a cruel way, a terrible way. But I am helpless. She is lying there unconscious. There is no time to waste. I must stifle her to death. Then I too must die. Let the whole world know, understand and realise why we had to die. With these words he would take a piece of paper, write a note and place it by her side. *(While acting this part he comes in contact with the note left by the Citizen and his fit of inspiration passes. He stands staring at the note.)*

P.C *(Making a sudden entrance)* Who is it? What is this? *(Sees the T.I lying on the stage)* Who died? *(The T.I. wakes up and looks around in wonder)* What is happening here?

T.I Constable, we have been telling you all the time we are discussing a play.

P.C Is that so? *(The S.I and T.I prepare to leave.)* Stop. Your play looks suspicious to me. How is it that every time I come here you are discussing a play?

T.I *(Interrupting)* It is the other way round. You come here everytime we are discussing a play.

P.C *(In an authoritative tone)* Shut up. Why do you think I come here? You make me come sending me false news and when I come you say you're doing a play.

S.I False news? We have sent you false news?

P.C Look at this *(Produces a note from his pocket.)*

S.I *(Reads and returns the note.)* Look, I have a similar note. *(Gives it to him)*

F.I *(Breaks his silence and laughs) (The P.C. compares the two notes and looks at him angrily)* I was going to ask how could a starving

young man find a letter in this open space. More surprise. He has found not one but two.

P.C Young man? What young man?

F.I *(Hurriedly)* The young man in the play, Constable.

P.C If he is in the play, how could he come here?

T.I *(Confused)* What did you say? Why has he come here? Who has come here?

P.C And how did the letter come here?

F.I *(Contemptuously)* It is the job of the police to find it out. *(To the other two)* Come, let us go inside.

T.I I left my bag behind, again.

P.C *(Suspiciously)* Are you sure you had it with you when you came?

S.I When I came? What do you mean?

T.I *(To the S.I)* No, it doesn't seem you brought it when you came.

P.C But when I came here earlier you had the bag in your hand.

F.I Why? Is holding a bag in the hand an offence? They came to me. I gave them the script of a play and also a bag to put it in so that the pages don't get mixed up. And he held the bag in his hand.

P.C Then why did he leave the bag behind?

T.I We came out to find out how a scene would go. *(To F.I and T.I)* At least now we know how the scene would run on the stage. Let us go and have a reading of the next scene. *(Leads the way. F.I and T.I look at the P.C with a smile and follow him)*

The P.C is surprised at the alacrity with which the three left. He stands there for a moment with his mouth open, scratches his chin with his right thumb and leaves. He has the look of a man who has

arrived at a decision. Before he leaves he throws a glance at the closed door.

The stage is empty for a few seconds. Then the Young Man seen at the beginning of the Act makes his entrance from the right. He makes sure there is no one around and makes a sign to someone with his hand. The Young Woman now enters the stage. The Young Man leads her to centrestage.

Y.M *(Heaves a big sigh of relief.)* At last we have escaped.

Y.W *(Unable to understand him)* From what?

Y.M Why? You forgot so quickly? What did the houseowner tell us when he threw us out of the house?

WIFE *(Young Woman) (Sadly)* I don't want to remember it. I had to hang down my head in shame. As I looked down I wished I could sink into the earth and disappear.

HUSBAND *(Young Man) (Staring at her in wonder)* Good! I didn't know my wife had developed such poetic talents.

WIFE Please stop it. After all, what did the houseowner say that we should take this as an escape?

HUSBAND He ordered us to clear out from his house. He said he would set the police after us, if we didn't obey. And just a minute before we were actually facing a policeman. I was really frightened. Things had gone topsy turvy. Luckily he went away. Wasn't that an escape?

WIFE Now where do you think we can go, Where are we going to spend the night?

HUSBAND *(Pretending anger)* What nonsense do you talk? Do I look like a husband who would spend the night elsewhere when his own wife is with him?

WIFE *(Staring at him)* Is it courage that makes you talk like this or lack of shame? I can't make out.

HUSBAND Why? What did I say to make you think like that?

WIFE Forget it. We don't have even the means to pay the rent for a single room. We were kicked out by the houseowner.

HUSBAND *(Interrupting)* That is a piece of good fortune for us.

WIFE Good fortune?

HUSBAND It may not be our good fortune. More likely the houseowner is a fool.

WIFE *(Hurt)* How can it be good fortune to be thrown out of the house?

HUSBAND Let me explain. That fool of a houseowner didn't even ask for arrears of houserent. Now he will have no occasion to do so. Hasn't he told us he would set the police after us if he sees us again?

WIFE *(Irritated)* Okay, he is a fool and you are a very clever man. Tell me what do you propose to do now. Or are you planning that from tomorrow we should go begging from house to house like vagabonds?

HUSBAND *(Looks up)* What divine moonlight this is! Wonderful.

WIFE *(Unable to control her anger)* Are you going to eat that? Why don't you answer my question first?

HUSBAND Answer your question? What question? *(Remembering)* Oh, You want to know what we are going to do now.

WIFE *(Furious)* Yes. Yes. Yes.

HUSBAND *(In a conciliatory tone)* You tell me. What do you think we should do?

WIFE *(Proudly)* I am a woman. What can I tell you? You shouldn't have married if you didn't know how to earn a living.

HUSBAND You are right.

WIFE When you couldn't get a permanent job, you should have at least worked as an ordinary worker.

HUSBAND You are right again.

WIFE *(Furious, stamping her feet)* Right, Right, Right. Do you think I am telling you all this to show off my intelligence or get your approval?

HUSBAND *(As though he understands all of it now)* So, this is for my benefit. Is that so?

WIFE What do you mean?

HUSBAND I shouldn't have married. I should have worked as a coolie. I should have entered an orphanage. Is this what you have been trying to tell me?

WIFE Who else is there to tell?

HUSBAND *(Heaving a big sign)* This is why our elders say- when you have knowledge you don't get opportunities and when opportunities come you are not equipped to take them.

WIFE *(Angry)* What is it you are trying to say?

HUSBAND The same. What you have been telling me. But we realise we shouldn't have married only after marriage. And we start thinking of permanent jobs only after we start work as day labourers.

WIFE *(Covers her face and sobs)*

HUSBAND *(Consoling her)* Poor girl! You have started crying. I was just trying to amuse you. Come, don't worry. I've decided long back what is to be done. *(There are tears in the wife's eyes, but her face shows love. She looks up. He takes hold of her face and raises it.)* Relax. We have no cares now. *(He leads her to the back stage. She walks slowly as she has no idea of what he is trying to do. They stop. He points out to the trees.)* Do you see that cluster of trees? Right in the middle there is a tall one. The lowest branch is 12 feet away from the ground. Let us use that hand in hand, lips on lips, because we can then use a single rope to tie round our necks.

WIFE *(Turns her face away in fear)* What a wretched thought. How inauspicious!

HUSBAND But it is the right thought. Don't you see? We will leave a note behind us. Or let it be. Even my pen is dry.

WIFE *(Her face turned away from him)* You seem to think dying is a joke.

HUSBAND Yes, when it is one's own choice. *(The wife shakes her head in disapproval)* Why? Are you not happy to die? You want to live? *(She nods her head. He pulls her where they were standing earlier)* You should have told me before. Oh, how well I had planned. I had taken care to carry in my shirt pocket a photograph showing both of us. Our bodies hanging together from the tree wouldn't make a nice picture, you see. The daily papers would have published the news in bold letters- - 'Two youths who would have been the pillars of society have hanged themselves to death.' *(With a sign)* Let it be. Didn't I tell you, you don't get opportunities when you have the knowledge? *(Stops when he notices that his wife has been staring at him all the time)*

WIFE Have you finished?

HUSBAND I had prepared myself to say all that I wanted to say before I died. We have missed death but I didn't want the preparation to go waste.

WIFE I wouldn't have caused you trouble if I had known how beaten you feel.

HUSBAND *(Insulted)* Do I look like a beaten man?

WIFE Then why were you ready to die?

HUSBAND What else could I have done?

WIFE I wouldn't have married you if I knew you were going to die.

HUSBAND But I was determined to marry you before I died!

WIFE *(Covering his mouth with her hand)* Don't. Don't speak inauspicious things.

HUSBAND *(Tired)* Then... What shall we do now?

WIFE Whatever work we are able to get. It is not a big thing to earn enough to feed ourselves. I want you, other things do not matter.

HUSBAND That is all right. What shall we do now, at this moment?

WIFE I don't know.

HUSBAND Look... We will think of work tomorrow. We can't wake up people at dead of night and ask them to give us work. Where are we going to spend the night?

WIFE Where you are is my home. Your shadow is my shelter.

HUSBAND O God! What a slippery logic you have!

WIFE What logic is that?

HUSBAND It is all the same. Look, when you speak intelligently I speak nonsense. When I talk sense you do otherwise. What kind of logic is that which does not permit both husband and wife to talk sense at the same time? I am putting you this intelligent question–Where shall we spend the night? And you...

WIFE *(Interrupting)* I am talking sense as well. Look in that direction. There is a house there and there is plenty of room on the steps.

HUSBAND If there are people in the house?

WIFE Let them be. They will be inside. We will sleep on the steps.

HUSBAND But outside the house is inside the world.

WIFE How does it matter?

HUSBAND People live outside this house as well. How if they see us?

WIFE Let them see. I am tired and sleepy. Any way I am not going to see those who may see us. *(Moves towards the steps.)*

HUSBAND *(Following her)* But we should be awake when the policeman comes. *(Sits down on the steps. The Wife sits by his side.)*

Silence for a few moments

HUSBAND *(Yawns loudly, looks around apprehensively and returns to the steps)* I don't think there are people in the house. *(More silence. The husband gets up and approaches the door, knocks hesitatingly and returns to the steps.) (In a whisper,)* There is no one inside. But the door is open.

WIFE Why shouldn't it be open?

HUSBAND How is that possible? There must be someone to open the door.

WIFE Why, you can go out and leave the door open.

HUSBAND You are right. I must be getting sleepy. *(Yawns again. Looks up)* How beautiful is this moonlight! That is why the Sanskrit poet says, 'The earth itself is my bed and the sky the covering.'

WIFE I don't understand.

HUSBAND You don't understand? These things cannot be explained to women. *(Again)* How is it that the door is open and there is no one inside? *(Listening attentively)* Look, it seems there are people inside. Don't you hear the sounds? They come from this side. *(Goes behind the house, takes a look and rushes back)* Bad luck for us. The policeman. Be quick. *(He helps her to get up, opens the door, goes inside with her and closes it.)*

The P.C. enters from behind the house. His knotted brows indicate suspicion and anger. He looks around and stops in front of the house.

P.C I think I heard some noise. *(Moves a step forward)* Do demons dance in their play? Or is their play addressed to me? Something is happening here--a play of darkness and light. They play games in the dark and show themselves in the light. Let me get to the end of this for once. *(As he goes up the steps,*

the Citizen approaches him. Angrily) Well, gentleman, are you still pursuing me?

CITIZEN *(Ignoring his words, secretively)* Are the dead bodies inside the house, Constable?

P.C Dead bodies? Haven't you removed those dead bodies from your head, yet?

CITIZEN I heard a rumour that a young couple have hanged themselves somewhere here.

P.C It seems no one can die without informing you.

CITIZEN *(Continuing)* I searched the trees there but didn't see any dead bodies. That is why I wanted to know whether they were inside the house.

P.C *(Comes down the steps and faces him)* Look, It is nearly midnight. I am a policeman. My duty is to take rounds. Go home and sleep. Or you will really see a dead body-- yours. What do you say?

CITIZEN Are you threatening me, just because you are a policeman?

CONSTABLE *(Folds his hands with a loud noise)* I am not threatening you, great man, I am folding my hands before you in salute. Please go away.

CITIZEN Why should it bother you if I stop here?

CONSTABLE *(Losing his patience)* What do you lose if you go when I am asking you to go.

CITIZEN *(Proudly)* It affects my rights as a citizen.

P.C Why did you bring that load here?

CITIZEN *(Ignoring him as before)* My rights are affected, my rights.

P.C. Do you mean to say it is your right to discover dead bodies wherever you go?

CITIZEN It is my literature.

P.C What is this new baggage?

CITIZEN My literature. It's my emotional baggage.

P.C *(Placating him)* Listen to me. You are getting sleepy. Your tongue has started blabbering nonsense.

CITIZEN *(Pitying him)* You will never understand that world of emotions. When a loving husband kills his wife, when a wife murders a husband she hates, when a love-lorn couple hang themselves to death...

P.C You should go where all these thing happen. You have no business to be here.

CITIZEN These things happen in literature. That is why literature is so pleasureable. If we want life also to give us pleasure these things should happen there as well.

P.C *(In a mocking tone)* We won't allow them to happen. Why are we, the police, here?

CITIZEN *(Proudly)* That's why I am giving you these lessons.

P.C What did you say *(Looks at the door which suddenly opens)*

The citizen takes advantage of the situation and disappears.
The three Individuals come out. They are surprised to see the policeman still there.

T.I *(To the P.C.)* Are you also doing a play, alone?

P.C. I am not alone. Can't you see him? *(Turning)* Oh, where did he go?

S.I. Who?

P.C. The same. He says it is his right. He had come here to exercise it. He says life will be pleasurable if only people who are in love kill each other.

S.I *(With a smile)* Come on, no one would talk like that. That may be your idea.

F.I Some strongly repressed emotion?

P.C Wait, wait for a second. You said one of you is a writer of plays and the others produce them, didn't you? Is that true?

T.I Why do you raise the question now?

P.C *(To the F.I)* Didn't you say that this is your house?

S.I Sure, it is his.

P.C How many people are living there?

T.I He is alone.

F.I You should produce a warrant if you want to interrogate me. What is your charge?

P.C *(Interrupting)* Who is interested in interrogating? I just wanted to make sure whether you are real people or spirits haunting a lonely house. *(He removes his helmet, wipes the sweat off his brow and exits.)*

(The other three watch him go and smile. They come down the steps.)

S.I *(To the F.I)* Then can we take it that you are going to write a play for us?

T.I We must have a play that bears your name. That is important for us.

F.I Why don't you write the play and put my name to it?

T.I *(Treats this as joke and laughs)* What would people say to us if we did that?

F.I That's what I think too. *(All move to the centre stage)* That's my thought too, I said. People must say something. But will they say it? What will they be able to say? They see mythological plays because they have nothing to say. They see historical plays because they don't want to say it to anyone. They see social plays because they are not allowed to say anything. I am going to tell you something in which I strongly believe. *(The other two cannot be seen by the audience now)* As long as in our society *(Looking in the direction in which the other two have*

disappeared) As long as in our society *(As the F.I. continues to speak, all the persons we have already seen- the face sighted at the start of the play, the Driver, the Young Woman, the Husband and the Wife--come out of the house and make their exits through the back right side of the audience.)* As long as in our society, individuals and circumstances with real interest in life do not appear, I will not write plays, no one can write them. Darkness, light--these are fundamental principles in life. The conflict between the two is the essence of existence. When such people do not exist, where can we get characters for our plays? *(Suddenly)* Oh, I had forgotten. *(Turns towards the house)*

S.I& T.I Why are you going there? You said you would come with us?

F.I I had forgotten to shut the door. I am joining you. *(The F.I. Enters the house, brings a lock and locks the house. He comes down the steps, looks round and after making sure that the house is safe, follows the S.I and the T.I)*

CURTAIN
End of Act III
End of the Play

LISTEN JANAMEJAYA

(1966)

'Kelu Janamejaya'

Translated by Padma Ramachandra Sharma

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

BACKGROUND

Readers of this play might have noticed a peculiar feature. None of the characters has a name. This explains the absence of the *dramatis personae.*

This is perhaps the best method for a writer who is honest and courageous but finds these qualities missing in the people around him, when he holds a mirror to life and looks into it.

When we mouth words like democracy, equality and secularism without the intellect illuminating these concepts or the heart reflecting them, the culture and the literature where this happens can turn out to be forces of self-deception and deception of others.

Darkness and light– the duality is a principle of life and this play provides an illustration. The duality appears also in the background setting of the play.

If anyone can show the characters of the play to belong to any particular community, I would conclude that the play has been a failure...

Sriranga

CHARACTERS

Sutradhara

Leader

Old Man

Young Man

Young Woman

Common Man



ACT ONE

This is what is seen when the curtain goes up. Horizon at night at the back of the stage, which means darkness at the back. But four hidden lamps have thrown light from the back revealing four hazy figures. From the left of the audience, four characters can be seen standing on the stage equidistant from one another. The first is an old man. He is dressed fully in the manner of his time. The second is a young man wearing a shirt with rolled up sleeves and pyjamas. The third is a young woman dressed up in modern clothes. At the end is common man, middle aged and dressed suitably. All these characters are standing like dolls without blinking. The old man is holding on to the easy chair in front of him. The young man is holding an ordinary chair before him, the young woman, the table brfore her and the common man, the stool in front as if for support. There are three office curtains separating the easy chair, the ordinary chair, the table and the stool. After this scene stays for a short while, a light at the front of the stage moves around the spectators as if searching for some one and eventually lights up the face of a person in the front row. He gets up immediately and comes to the stage as the light follows him. The stage becomes bright with light. The four lights behind the characters disappear. However, the four characters stand still like statues until further instructions. The person standing before the audience with his hands folded is the Sutradhara as can be made out from his words.

SUTRADHARA *(Speaking politely with hands folded)* Salutation and welcome. Forgive me. You may be curious to know who I am and why I am here talking. That's why I will tell it to you first. I am the Sutradhara. Oh, I have forgotten to tell you the most important thing. You are invited here to watch a play. Why a play here? Is this a place to enact a play? What sort of a play is this with lifeless characters standing around? I know you will ask these questions. What can I do, Gentlemen and... Ladies? It feels as if man is ashamed of his actions and qualities. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been shown behind

closed doors and strong walls on all the four sides. I am the Sutradhara. My job is to show you the play and not to find a suitable place for it. If you ask me, it is not my job either to write a play. The person who wrote this play told me he had written a very good play and it would be good for me too if the play was put on. I have brought the play before you. Who knows if even the writer was hesitant about showing it in public and pushed me before you? You have seen these four characters. You will see their interiors, their exteriors and the battlefield in three acts. An old man, *(He opens his eyes and gazes)* a young man, *(He does the same)*, a young woman *(She too does the same)* and a common man. In this manner you will plunge with Sriranga–I beg your pardon–*chaduranga*, an entire army into the struggle of life. I said 'plunge'. There is a reason for it. Why are these characters like lifeless statues? Why? Do you want to know why? They are lifeless because there is life not in them but outside in front of them; what it means is that you alone are their life. So if you sit still where you are and kindly enter their bodies, the play will start. If you do so, it will be like raising the level of life to the stage.

('It must be raised', a voice is heard at a distance and another person stands up in the auditorium).

SUTRADHARA *(Looking at that person)* Oh, the leader is here! It is his job to talk. Let him take charge of the work ahead.

(He moves aside. The Leader comes to the stage from the auditorium. Though this character faces the spectators, his gaze stays a little above that of the spectators)

LEADER It has to be raised. I said the level of life must be raised. It should be raised to Mars, to the Moon and if necessary, even to the Sun. It is enough; this life on earth has gone on for thousands of aeons. Like a rented house, the earth is collapsing. It has become old enough for one to feel that the repairs cost more than the construction. We have had enough of this rented earth which makes us feel sick

even about the neighbor's shadow. Walking up, eating, working, sleeping, sleeping and waking up, waking up and eating, eating and working, working and sleeping. We are fed up. Being born, growing up and dying; being born and growing up, growing up and dying, dying and being reborn, we are fed up. One should never be born. If one is born, one should never die-- Life must be raised to this level. We can stop getting born; we have to stop dying. Then it can be said that the level of man's existence has reached the height of divinity. The experience of thousands of aeons gone by and the zest for future aeons--man should profit by both and raise himself *(looking at the characters on the stage standing like statues).* Experience, zest, will, power to act. *(looking at the Sutradhara as if something has suddenly flashed across his mind)* Sutradhara.

SUTRADHARA Yes, Sir.

LEADER Why do you perform a play?

SUTRADHARA Because it is my profession, Sir.

LEADER No, no, don't say that, Drama is not a profession, it is an art.

SUTRADHARA *(Uncomprehending)* What does that mean?

LEADER *(As if he knows everything)* It means--it means- evolution of the self. No. One may perhaps say this of the inner light- that means the evolution of the self in the inner light *(in a don't you know even this voice.)* Did you understand?

SUTRADHARA *(As one obeying orders)* I have understood, Sir. What next?

LEADER That's what I am asking. What is the purpose of performing a play?

SUTRADHARA The purpose is to make a living, Sir.

LEADER Chi! Chi! How constricted!

SUTRADHARA No, not constricted Sir! That's why philosophers say that everything seen is false. The stomach does look

constricted. But only the one who fills it knows how expansive it is. Though it keeps being filled up until death, it remains empty, Sir.

LEADER That's why I said that the level of life on earth must be raised. So our lives have become narrowed in this rented earth–house, where we have to look for the kitchen before renting it. As long as we are on earth, this habit of filling our stomachs will not leave us. We won't progress.

SUTRADHARA Why, Sir? As long as the stomach is in front, it keeps pulling us forward. The way ahead is visible only to the protruding stomach. That's why animals which have stomachs below or within have not progressed as man has.

LEADER *(Staring at him for a while)* Well done Sutradhara! Knowingly or unknowingly you have expressed a lofty idea. If the play you are performing is as lofty...

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* Sir, what do you mean by the play I am performing? Who am I to perform a play? What am I worth? You are the one who performs. You are the one that makes me perform.

LEADER What do you mean?

SUTRADHARA What do I mean? What play can equal the play of man? Where would you find such on inventor as man who gave up walking on four feet, walked on only two and turned the other two into hands? Which other scientist could put an end to the brazenness of man who would pull down any woman he saw and with marriage stopped body and society becoming diseased? Is there another architect like man who has erected a modern building on the foundation of the experience of the past and builds upstairs to look for the path ahead?

LEADER Enough, enough Sutradhara. Start the play immediately, if it is as entertaining as your talk. Fill dead bodies with life again. Start the play.

SUTRADHARA That is not my job, Sir.

LEADER *(Taken aback)* what did you say? Is it not your job to start the play?

SUTRADHARA That was not what I said. I meant infusing dead bodies with life is not my job.

LEADER *(At a loss)* Whose job is that?

SUTRADHARA It is the playwright's

LEADER Where is he?

SUTRADHARA That's my question as well. Where is he?

LEADER *(Surprised)* What do you mean?

SUTRADHARA I asked you where the playwright was, Sir.

LEADER *(Still at a loss)* What do you mean? You said yourself that the playwright told you all sorts of things.

SUTRADHARA Yes; that was about the man who wrote the play.

LEADER What does that mean? Isn't the playwright the one who wrote the play?

SUTRADHARA I too am asking the same question, Sir.

LEADER *(At a loss and slightly angry)* What are you asking?

SUTRADHARA I am asking whether the one who wrote the play would be the playwright as well.

LEADER *(Sighing with relief)* Is this the kind of humour present in your play?

SUTRADHARA *(Startled)* Humour? Where does humour come in?

LEADER *(Sounding fed up)* If it is not humour then call it ridicule, call it mischief. How can you say the one who wrote the play is not the playwright?

SUTRADHARA How can you say, Sir, that what he wrote was a play?

LEADER What do you mean?

SUTRADHARA I mean that the ones who enact it and those that watch it should both feel that it is a play. Is it enough for the writer to say it is a play? That's why I requested that you should all enter others' bodies and infuse life into these statue-like creatures, to be neutral in the auditorium and raise life to the level of the stage.

LEADER *(Looking at the unmoving statues)* Chee! If life has to be infused into the lifeless, one should be at a higher level than earth. Here on this earth such corpses–such lifeless things are the muddy footsteps of Father Time. What can you fill in them? Possibly air. Then they could fly high and cross the boundaries of the mortal world.

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* What happens to me then? What about my profession? Sir, please stop your travel to another world for the moment. You will see these dolls turn into living characters as sleeping men wake up. On earth, a man who lives, has to die...

LEADER *(Interrupting)* That's why I say we should leave the earth.

SUTRADHARA *(Continuing what he was saying)* That a man who has lived should die is an inescapable fact on earth. Coming back to life is earth's great law. You can come alive again. Move away from the world of the stage for now.

LEADER And you?

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* In so far as being dead though still living is concened, you are my leader. I am your follower. You are the thread. I hold. I shall show you the way. Walk lightly so that the end doesn't snap *(Enacting it, they both go in from the right of the audience. Silence for a while. The stage becomes dark suddenly and the old man's face is lit up immediately. In that light, he comes forward like a machine, looks up as if he is thinking to himself though he is facing the audience.)*

OLD MAN Lifeless! Corpse! Weakling! *(With a smile of seniority)* Ha ha! He said muddy footsteps of Father Time. Alas! What does he know? This life has established itself through the

experience of lakhs of years and preserved its strength and he calls it lifeless! Ha! This is life continuously engaged in action. This is enjoying itself in a variety of activities. This is life growing from experience to experience. Does he know that I am the image of countless emotions and desires? And what experiences! I have the experience of growing without eating, in my mother's womb. I have the experience of eating without working, on my mother's lap. I have learnt the knack of eating in order to grow, in my childhood, at home and school. And then the hard work to support my wife and children. I have even the experience of toiling and not being able to eat, as a father of growing children. I have made others work and eaten. I have snatched food from others and eaten it. Abba! How am I lifeless when I have had such a variety of artistic experiences of eating to live?

I am the basic principle of progress. Instead of eating whatever was found in the forest, I have grown what I wanted to eat and have experience of stepping forward in the path of progress. Am I a weakling? Instead of eating anything that could be laid hands on, I placed a woman in front of the fire to cook tastefully. Am I a corpse? Haha! I created a society where one could eat and live happily through the toil of others. Am I lifeless? Alas! This mad man doesn't know. He is fed up with the earth. He wants to go to the moon. He doesn't realise that without experience, it is just imagination. Use my given experience and there will be no need to try to go to the moon. I can turn the earth into the moon. Mars, moon, earth- these are words like foam in the mouth of a man tired out by dry enthusiasm. There is no achievement without experience. The fruit cannot be reached merely by having enthusiasm *(He mumbles to himself as if he is tired out by saying so much)* Me, lifeless? A weakling? *(Walking slowly, he turns his back to the audience and goes towards the armchair. As the Leader rushes forward, the Sutradhara stops him, says no by gestures and pulls him back. Meanwhile, the Old Man has come near the armchair and stands facing the audience)* I am–I am–an

image of experience. It is only through me that there is fulfillment *(as he sits on the easy chair, the light on his face vanishes; he mumbles)* Listen to my words. There is no fulfillment without experience. Enthusiasm alone will not bring in fruition.

Darkness on the stage again. In a moment light reveals the Young Man's face. Like the Old Man, he too walks forward with an expression of having been provoked by someone. Before that he looks up and around like the Old Man did.

YOUNG MAN Stupidity! There is no fulfillment without experience? Enthusiasm alone will not bring in fruition? Stupidity! Experience! What is experience? The fruit of enthusiasm is experience. What other experience is there? Am I, the emobodiment of zest, corpse-- like? I can preserve my life and have the power to bring another life into existence. Am I lifeless? Fed up with the earth? That, that impotent reflection is mere experience. Is progress possible with such experience? The basic inspiration for progress is zest. Me in other words. There is strength in my body, zeal in my mind, hope in my heart. I--I am the symbol of zest, the basic principle of progress. There is no fulfillment without experience? Ha! Experience has eyes at the back and fulfillment faces ahead! Is it ever possible for them to meet each other? It is wrong, illusion, contrary reason. I am progress. Experience which does not have the strength to stand firmly on one foot while the other is being lifted cannot even take a step further. It might stumble where it stands. Experience is blind. Even after seeing what has happened in the past, it hasn't reformed itself. Experience is lame. It is treading on the same spot over and over again. Experience is deaf. It has to preach the same thing over and over again. Stupidity! To Say that experience brings in progress is sheer idiocy. If you trust experience, doom is a certainty... Chee! What is experience? Ramayana's Ravana, kings in history, today's peasant--all coveted other men's wives. Whose experience achieved the welfare of others? Vishwamitra desired Vasishta's Kamadhenu! Ashoka desired the kingdom of Kalinga. The experience of one did

not save the other. Both fought wars. No achievement without experience? Achievement needs intelligence, experience has no intelligence! *(He is now excited by his own reflections)* That's all false, wrong, deceitful. The life breath of achievement is Zeal. Its strength is Zeal, Zeal! Zeal! That's what brought the savage to a home, made troublesome man engage himself in activity, pulled out and threw away the stones and thorns of brutality, smoothened the ups and downs of tyranny and laid the road to organisation. Zest for happiness, peace, security. Zest for the journey towards progress. When the basic principle of man's life is the zeal that heals wounds, it is not enough to have just experience which is like a wound. Why the moon? Why the sun? If there is zest, it is but a minute away. Zest, zest tireless zest–Only though this *(He mumbles as if he has lost the train of thought and walks back like the Old Man did. The Leader again pushes forward and the Sutradhara pulls him back. The Young Man sits on the chair)* Tireless zest. Herein is the source of the flood of progress.

Darkness again on the stage. The next second light illuminates the Young Woman's face. The face is already blooming with a smile. She walks to the front stage like the two characters before and acts as if she heard something.

YOUNG WOMAN I hear the sound of piteous breathing from somewhere. *(Listens more intently)* Oh, somebody seems to be fatigued by tireless zest. What does one gain by babbling 'zest, zest' all the time? What is gained by zest without will power? What one needs most is will power alongside ability and tolerance. It is all right for man to shout, 'zest, zest.' If that zest can be stopped, captured and turned into will power and given a form there is real fulfillment. Build a dam to a running river to make the land fertile. Flowing water flows on. What kind of zeal is that to think that the land is fertile because of the flow? Man is like flowing water. Woman is the dam that stops and holds it in spite of suffering the continuous thrashing of water. She is the instrument for achieving success. She is the mother who gives life. She is the

one who gives form to man's zeal to create something new. Without a woman who gives food, blood and breath to the foetus in the womb and makes it into a living creature, how could man ever progress? Alas! Man speaks of experience, speaks of zest. What can be achieved by them? If woman was not the embodiment of will power, man would have realised how barren the earth could be. The progress of man depends on how he has desired woman in an orderly way. Why the moon? Why the sun? Or is it possible for a man even to think of another world after he sees a woman? Will power. It needs a heart that can fly. If there was no woman, which heart could have taken flight? *(Getting caught in confused thinking and mumbling)* A heart that can fly, the desire for woman, the beauty of life. This is it. It is from this that there is fulfillment. There is progress because of it. Which path can man traverse without getting on the horse of desire? Willpower is the horse that is needed for the path of progress. *(She walks back like the other two characters. The Leader is pushing forward. The Sutradhara is pulling him back. She places both hands on the table)* Will power is necessary for progress *(She mumbles.)*

The stage is in darkness again. Immediately loud laughter is heard. When the Common Man's face is lit up, it becomes clear that he is the one laughing. He walks forward still laughing. Like the other characters, he reaches the edge of the stage, up front, lifts his head, controlling laughter

COMMON MAN How funny! I have never seen a man rejecting earth. Who is he to say he wants this and doesn't want that? He doesn't get born because he desires to be born. Death cannot be avoided by saying one doesn't want to die. Why get meaningless thoughts in the head? What was there in the past? What will happen in future? Man kills himself caught in this train of thought. There was darkness in the past. There will be darkness in the future. How does it matter? Isn't it enough to strike a match and produce light wherever one is? Why should one be bothered about inconsequential matters?

A mother who has newly given birth has no experience of feeding the baby. The new born baby isn't even aware of suckling. Nevertheless, the mother feeds it and the baby sucks. The world moves on. Isn't that so? Does a mother feed her baby only after learning the lesson that it is the duty of a mother to feed the child? Does the newborn baby have the awareness that mother's breast milk is healthy and it is possible to grow only by drinking it? When things are so, why should man start calculating everything? He has to go ahead! Become a big man! Who is a big man now? Let him come and stand in front of me. I shall tell him. Doesn't he eat because he is a big man? Beget children? Have no desire for money? Not yawn when he is sleepy? Sneeze when he has a cold? What does that mean? What sort of a big man is he? Why is he a big man? If you ask me, it is sheer madness. A man is just a man after all. Why call him a corpse? A wealkling? I work with my hands and fill my stomach. How can I be called a corpse? Wanting to be in front, wanting that, wanting this! Do you get something by opening your mouth wide and saying you need something or do you get it by working hard? My father died when I was four. What lay ahead for me? Who had the leisure to fill his head with thoughts? I worked for who ever fed me. Then they gave me clothes. Later on, they gave me food, clothes and a salary as well. I had meals. I had clothes. I put away my salary for I didn't need it. It has been twenty five to thirty years since I started putting it away. It could now be hundreds or thousands. Who wants those calculations? If one uses whatever intellect one has for living, he is called a fool. If he uses it for calculating what is not, he is called an intelligent man. Man's business is so topsy--turvy! He dies grieving for happiness. If he can contain his sorrow, what joy there would be– *(stops suddenly as if caught in confusion)* Hey, What's this? I have also started to jabber. It must be the company I keep *(mumbles)*. There is no use in indulging in idle thought. Must work hard and eat; Eat and work hard; work and get tired; get tired and sleep. Wake up and work, labour hard, eat, get

tired, sleep and don't pamper the intellect; If you do so, calculating will begin. While working, the joy of eating later; when tired, the joy of sleeping later. When the woman one desires escapes, the joy of chasing and catching her; If she escapes when one gets really near, greater joy at the thought of certain capture. That is what happiness is. A woman who wants to escape. There should be strength to chase as well for experiencing such joy. *(Walks slowly towards his stool at the back. Mumbling, he sits on the stool facing the spectators)* Whatever it is, the most important thing is to have the strength to do it. *(Laughing suddenly)* like our intelligent friends say–will power-ha! ha!

Darkness spreads on the stage again, but in a moment the stage is full of light. When the next scene is enacted, a screen should come down concealing all the four characters. It has an advantage also for the next episode.

As soon as the stage is lit, the Sutradhara drags the Leader on to the stage from the right of the spectators. The Leader keeps pulling back as if he is not enthusiastic. Eventually the Sutradhara brings the Leader on to the stage from the right.

SUTRAḌHARA Sir, for the first three times you used to rush out as soon as the character finished his speech. It was a great effort for me to stop you. Now when everything is over and even after my calling you and dragging you, you wouldn't come!

LEADER Hey, Sutradhara, this appears to be some trickery of yours *(Thinks for a while)* Or could it be your intelligence that is stopping me? *(With an expression on his face as if he is remembering something from the past)* Goodness! That Old Man! What thoughts he had! I didn't know that it was what experience is about. As I listened to him. I felt like running to him and saluting him, falling at his feet and acquiring the full benefit of his experience. Then, you stopped me. This damned Sutradhara is worried about his play, I thought. Play be damned! I should push him aside and rush out. Abba! What

philosophy! There might neither be principles in it nor wisdom. Who knows? But I felt I saw some light in it then. *(Seeing the Sutradhara smile)* Did I say some? All sorts of things happened. You stopped me. I was very disappointed. But later, that boy! Wonderful! What zest! It is not enough just to say 'zest'. You must stress every syllable. I was so angered. I thought it was good you stopped me quickly. If there was such zest in life, what did it matter which world you were in. When I wanted to rush out at least to get a feel of that enthusiasm, your arm came right across again. Really! What should I do with this Sutradhara? I said. I thought it wouldn't matter even if I put my feet on his chest and cross over. I thought I had to do something but you stopped me yet again *(The Sutradhara smiles again.)* I know why you smile. I do accept that I felt as if I had lost myself as soon as I heard that girl speak. Goodness! What thinking! Inspiration that would make a man do anything! Such liveliness in the face, daring in the voice! Finally she said that the only one that could achieve fulfillment was the woman! Nevertheless, I didn't feel insulted at that moment. I forgot the difference between man and woman and rushed ahead as if drawn by some power. *(Sutradhara laughs loudly)* Honestly, I didn't remember I was a man. I wasn't aware she was a woman. Honestly.

SUTRADHARA I didn't laugh because of that, Sir. I know why you rushed forward three times. But I am asking you what happened to you the final time?

LEADER It was as if I was slapped!

SUTRADHARA *(Surprised)* What did you say?

LEADER As if I was slapped. As I went near, it was as if the hardness and speed of slapping had both increased.

SUTRADHARA *(As if wanting to learn more)* Why?

LEADER Who knows! The old man's experience, the boy's zest, the girl's attractiveness, it all seemed false and wrong.

SUTRADHARA It is true in a way.

LEADER *(Amazed)* what did you say?

SUTRADHARA It is not a lie to say it was false. It is not a mistake to say it was wrong.

LEADER Chee! Chee! You talk just like the Common Man who spoke at the end.

SUTRADHARA Who am I to say anything? What am I? You are the one who makes me speak.

LEADER *(Staring at him for a while)* Are you the Sutradhara or a character in the play?

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* Why, Sir? Why this doubt?

LEADER Why do you ask me? If you are Sutrdhara, talk so that you are understood.

SUTRADHARA What did I say now that you didn't understand?

LEADER You say everything the Old Man, the Young Man and the Young Woman said was false and wrong.

SUTRADHARA Not only that. What the Common Man said at the end was also false and wrong.

LEADER *(As if scoffing)* What it means is that your play itself is like that.

'SUTRADHARA Why do you misunderstand me, Sir? What you have been watching till now is not the play. It is the first Act. I had told you at the beginning itself. This is the First Act called Interior of my play. You have yet to see the Exterior.

LEADER *(Interrupting)* What is this 'Interior–Exterior' in man? Man is man. He doesn't have arms, legs, nose and ears inside as well.

SUTRADHARA No, Sir, Don't be hasty. When you say top and bottom, you can see both sides. When you say in front and at the back, you can see both sides very well. But when you say inside and outside, can you see the inside as you can see the outside?

LEADER Why should you see it? Shouldn't one be content with whatever one can see?

SUTRADHARA What is seen is not what it appears to be. Why is it that nothing stays the same always?

LEADER *(In a surprised voice)* Things are not what they appear to be! What does that mean? If you really look at it-

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* That's exactly what I am saying. What one sees depends on how one sees it. For the husband who looks at his wife at home, another man's wife seen in the street appears beautiful. Isn't that so? Why?

LEADER So? What are you saying anyway?

SUTRADHARA This is all I want to say. An infant is red like live coals when it is born. It turns gray when·it is of the age to play around in the streets but descends into the colour of coal when it gets married. Why?

LEADER *(Uncomprehendingly)* Why?

SUTRADHARA As a play changes from act to act, life changes colour from one stage to another. But it is the colour of the exterior. You might forget the person inside as you look at the colour changing on the outside. I have shown the inner person at the beginning itself so that you don't forget him while the colour outside changes. But you will watch in the second Act who they are outisde and what their thinking is.

End of the First Act

ACT TWO

The curtain which had been lowered before should be go up in accordance with the words that were spoken previously at the end of the Act. Now, the whole scene has changed. The four characters that appeared before are now live characters of the play. The stage arrangement has also changed. Three office curtains that were hanging straight across are now placed slant to indicate three office rooms. In the first room, the Old Man is seen sitting in an arm-chair, a table in front of him and on it material to suit an officer's grade and work. There is a calling bell. In the second room, the Young Man is seated on an ordinary chair, a cup and saucer on the table before him. He is drinking coffee or tea. Papers and files lie scattered on his table. By the side of the table facing him, sits the Young Woman in a chair. There is typewriter on the table in front. Work has stopped halfway. She is looking at herself in the mirror in her compact, in tune with the feminine temperament. In front of the office curtains, the Common Man sits on a peon's stool, smoking a beedi. Soon after curtains are drawn, the Old Man rings the bell on his table. Immediately, the Young Man picks up files. The Young Woman runs her fingers on the typewriter with great speed. The Common Man puts out the beedi against the stool and pushes the stub under his headgear. For a while all these act as if the bell may be rung again. But the Sutradhara and the Leader act as if the curtain has not been drawn at all as far as they are concerned.

The Leader, until now, stands scratching his head and gazing at the Sutradhara. Then, as if realising there is no use standing there, he tries to go past the Sutradhara from the left of the spectators.

SUTRADHARA *(Stopping him)* What is this? You are going off, Sir?

LEADER *(In an utterly defeated voice)* What else can I do? Tell me what to do. I too have read and heard a great deal about plays. Once upon a time, people thought that plays meant entertainment. But ever since one started paying money to see a play, entertainment disappeared and moneymaking began. Drama started being enacted according to the whims of

the king who paid most. Then they said that Drama should reflect society. As the left is right and vice--versa in a mirror, the topsy--turvey nature of society became Drama. Accepting dowry in society, but saying no to it in a play, pulling one's hair and screaming about love marriage in a play but in society sitting where the father dragged one by the hair and marrying the girl whose face appeared in front. *(Looking at the smile spreading across the Sutradhara's face, stops)*

SUTRADHARA So, Drama turned into politics. Saying one thing and doing something else-

LEADER *(Stubbornly, wanting to continue speaking)* But you have now cooked up another game altogether. Showing what is inside and outside at the same time.

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* How many times do I need to say it, Sir? Who am I to show anything? Who can show things? One should open one's eyes to see. My job is just to see that your eyes are kept open.

LEADER So your play will not let us sleep.

SUTRADHARA Not my play. Your mind.

LEADER *(Not understanding it and so surprised)* What did you say?

SUTRADHARA I said 'your mind'. Your mind won't let you sleep.

LEADER *(Startled)* What sin have I committed to be so restless in my mind that I cannot sleep?

SUTRADHARA What do you mean? Whose play do you think this is?

LEADER Whose play? *(Not being able to answer)* Whose play? It belongs to the one who wrote it; or you can say it is yours because you are enacting it.

SUTRADHARA *(Shaking his head)* It belongs to neither. They say that a girl who is born to you belongs to those you give her away to. The play that has been written belongs to society which had the play written. The play enacted belongs to the

spectators. In effect, it is yours. You are the one that created the characters here.

LEADER *(Greatly surprised)* Me? Me?

SUTRADHARA *(Nodding)* You, the leader. It is only you! You are the one that enthused people to build a new society. It was you alone. You wanted everything new but were old yourself. So you said there was need for experience to build a new society. Experience is old. It doesn't have strength. So you said you needed young men. If only young men came to your side, there was a chance that the other half consisting of women would join. So you said you wanted young women. Scared that experience may change, if independent thinking grew in society, you brought up the common man calling him an independent citizen. Excuse me. I had to start a speech after collecting people to see a play. But I did so because you had more faith in listening to a speech in a meeting than watching the play in person. It is not fair to give away to some one else the play you designed and the effort of watching it. So, please...

LEADER (Interrupting) I hope you haven't gone mad. I had heard that nowadays writers write like insane people; but are those that enact the play just as mad? The characters I created? The play I wrote?

SUTRADHARA Oh, the fault was mine. Probably you didn't recognise them because I showed the interior. If you saw them as they appear on the outside...

LEADER *(Interrupting)* Whatever form they assume, how does it concern me?

SUTRADHARA That Old Man, that Young Man, that Young Woman and that Common Man?

LEADER Where?

SUTRADHARA In your Nava Samaja Nirmana Office.

LEADER What? What did you say? In our office?

SUTRADHARA Just there. Come, I'll show you.

He holds the Leader's hand, walks across the stage to the edge to the right of the audience, turns around, stops and walks back to the spot where they were before

LEADER What is this? You have really brought me to our office.

SUTRADHARA Ssh! Look inside.

LEADER *(Stares and is surprised)* What is this? These people? Working in our office?

SUTRADHARA Ssh! Ssh! You have recognised them now. Don't make a sound or let's hide ourselves. Come and watch the play your characters enact.

Both disappear from the left of the spectator. Now, the activity of the characters on stage begins again. The Common Man putting the beedi in his mouth, strikes a match. The Young Woman is looking at the mirror and painting her lips. The Young Man is staring at her and drinking his tea. The Old Man is nodding drowsily. Soon, the Old Man's head hits the calling bell and produces sound. The other characters sit up immediately and start pretending to work as they did before. A minute later.

YOUNG MAN *(Looking at the Young Woman)* At least he has enough strength to ring the bell!

COMMON WOMAN Of Course! What do you know?

YOUNG MAN (As if it is a mystery) What do you mean?

COMMON MAN Did he ring the bell to show he was awake or is there something to be done? *(Tries to get up)*

YOUNG MAN *(Picking up files)* When he sits on the chair, he has nothing else to do *(Stands up)*.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Putting aside the mirror)* If the call is for me, I am ready too.

COMMON MAN *(Mumbling)* Looking at the way he rings the bell, he must have been a priest in his previous life or will be one

in his next. *(The Old Man, the Young Man and the Young Woman sit in separate rooms; Common Man, realising that he is sitting outside, stands by the curtain and peeps in as if through a door.)*

OLD MAN *(In a busy, impatient voice)* What have you been doing?

COMMON MAN I have just come back from your house, Sir.

OLD MAN *(Surprised)* From my house?

COMMON MAN *(In a submissive voice)* I had gone there to bring your glasses.

OLD MAN *(Voice of authority)* How long have you been gone? Two hours possibly.

COMMON MAN I would have come back earlier, Sir. But your servant couldn't find them however much he looked for them.

OLD MAN *(Fed up all at once)* Disgusting! You just waste time, bringing something left behind at home. But I know you enjoy leaving the office. You should have asked me again before you left. I would have told you that my glasses have been lying here in the office since yesterday.

COMMON MAN *(As if it was his fault)* I didn't realise that, Sir *(about to leave).*

OLD MAN Hey, look here, I could have sat at home quietly, taking my pension. Why do you think they appointed me here? They know my nature. However much work there might be, I am the one to finish it in a jiffy. I came here to make sure that work here didn't suffer. Do you understand? Let it be. Send me that fellow. *(Common Man appears as though he doesn't understand. Old Man is slightly angry)* Send that fellow. Step on it! *(Grumbling)* It was not like this in our days.

COMMON MAN *(Coming 'out')* That fellow, this fellow. He doesn't remember the name of a single person. It is even possible that some day or the other, this old man might even go off forgetting his life itself in the office or at home *(He comes to*

where he was sitting before, lights a beedi, pulls out a faded illustrated story book, or novel and sits down. The Young Man laughs suddenly and the Young Woman stares at him).

YOUNG WOMAN What's the matter?

YOUNG MAN I just thought of something?

YOUNG WOMAN Is it something you can't tell me?

YOUNG MAN Why not? Our office is called 'Nava Samaja Nirmana Kendra'; Who is the builder of this new society? An old man!

YOUNG WOMAN *(Coyly)* Oh, no!

YOUNG MAN No, no! Don't misunderstand me. I shall tell you why the thought came and how? Brahma was the creator of the universe. He is called Pitamaha, grandfather. We have a grandfather in our office here.

YOUNG WOMAN That means you need experience to do something big.

YOUNG MAN Experience? What does that mean? Do you say that this old man has the experience of building a new society? Everyone knows why he got this job.

YOUNG WOMAN *(as if she knows nothing)* Why?

YOUNG MAN He had married the Leader's sister.

YOUNG WOMAN That is what is called 'experience.'

YOUNG MAN What do you mean? Do you need experience even before marrying?

YOUNG WOMAN You do need experience to know what you gain by marrying someone.

YOUNG MAN *(Surprised)* What is that? Do you mean to say people who lived earlier knew nothing of love?

YOUNG WOMAN *(As if she knew everything)* They knew that and something else.

YOUNG MAN What do you mean?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Coyly)* I don't know, let it be.

YOUNG MAN *(As if to himself)* House full of children. Love outside. No, that's the life of primitive people.

YOUNG WOMAN The other day I read in some paper...

YOUNG MAN What was it?

YOUNG WOMAN The things they make today-- atom bomb, hydrogen bomb. It said that these would have bad effects...

YOUNG MAN Yes, possibly. But...

YOUNG WOMAN *(Interrupting)* No one would be able to bear children in future.

YOUNG MAN *(Laughing)* Ha, ha! If newspapers print truth there'll be nothing left to write about, ha, ha!

COMMON MAN *(As he reads to himself)* Ha, what a man! As he galloped on the horse, he picked her up and carried her away. He is a man in the real sense! *(Smacks his lips. The beedi falls down. He starts lighting another).*

YOUNG WOMAN No, it seems it was a great scientist who said it-

YOUNG MAN *(Interrupting)* What does it matter how big a scientist he is? God created the difference between man and woman.

YOUNG WOMAN Do you believe in God?

YOUNG MAN *(Surprised)* What did you say? Believe in God?

YOUNG WOMAN What I mean is, is there a God who looks after everyone in the same way, does justice to all...?

YOUNG MAN *(Taking a deep breath)* I don't believe in such a God. If such a God did exist, *(Indicates the Old Man's room)* would there be such injustice? Fancy becoming a clerk in an office which deals with matters I have taken a special degree in. Fortunately, our Leader has only one sister. Otherwise, I'd

have no hopes of gaining that position even after this Old Man died.

YOUNG WOMAN *(With a taunting smile)* If he had another sister, you'd have married her.

YOUNG MAN Anyhow, you don't get a job because of your degree. You need pedigree.

The Old Man rings the bell as if he is angry. Hearing it, these two start pretending to work as before. Common Man throws the book away and gets up as if his meditation is broken, as if he is going to pronounce a curse

COMMON MAN Keeping a bell in front of him is like putting a bell round a cow's neck. It clangs at every step *(He comes into the 'room' of the Young Man and the Young Woman as the Young Man is getting ready to attend to the call).*

YOUNG WOMAN This is my turn. Isn't it so? *(Common Man nods, looking for something; the Young Man takes out a cigarette pack from the drawer, puts a cigarette in his mouth, keeps the pack back in the drawer and continues to look for something)* Do you know why he calls me?

COMMON MAN If I knew that, I'd be sitting in his chair.

YOUNG MAN *(Angry at not finding what he wanted, opening and closing drawers noisily)* I don't know whether he remembers why he calls me by the time I go in!

COMMON MAN *(Taking out a match box from his head gear and giving it to the Young Man)* He may break his hand by ringing the bell again!

YOUNG MAN *(Taking the match box)* Thanks *(Strikes the match, lights the cigarette, gives the box back)* There's a little more tea left. You can take it. Who knows what my state will be by the time I go in and come out! Get me some more tea. *(Starts leaving) Hatho wa badathim prapya, jitwa wa bhokshyase vargam. (Walks first to where the Common Man's stool is and then goes to the Old Man's room as Common Man did earlier. Steps are taken very slowly under the pretext of looking at files)*

YOUNG WOMAN After he gets back, it will be my turn.

COMMON MAN If the Old Man is alive till then.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Acting as if scared)* What's this? What sort of thing are you saying?

COMMON MAN That Old Man is not about to die. Don't worry, Avva!

YOUNG WOMAN Look, What you say is scary to listen to. In case we go in and find he has died *(Stopping as Common Man laughs)* What did you find funny?

COMMON MAN *(Controlling his laughter)* I thought it might very well happen. Looking at you, even hearts of young people may stop all of a sudden, leave alone the Old Man's *(He stops because of laughter)*

YOUNG WOMAN *(Either coy or angry)* Get lost, rascal! You speak nonsense!

COMMON MAN Look at the mirror and tell me if what I say is false *(Young Woman picks up the mirror by force of habit and puts it down immediately. He laughs)* Don't think I am nobody, Avva. My father had over a hundred acres of land. Depending on it, he borrowed money; he kept back fifty acres and sold the rest to pay back the loan.

YOUNG WOMAN Whose story are you telling me?

COMMON MAN Whose else? It is mine.

YOUNG WOMAN What? Do you have fifty acres?

COMMON MAN Not much, just fifty acres.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Obstinately)* Fifty acres of what? That's what I asked you.

COMMON MAN *(With the obstinacy of some one bent on giving information)* Just fifty acres, neither farm nor land. Not a field to grow on, or land to build.

YOUNG WOMAN Then why did you come here to work?

COMMON MAN You tell me why I might have come.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Trying to change the subject)* Why are you trying to tell me all this?

COMMON MAN You tell me why I am saying all this to you.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Fed up)* I ask you and you tell me to answer.

COMMON MAN That's the sign of a real man.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Amazed)* What did you say?

COMMON MAN A woman should be happy even if she is carried away by a rider on a galloping horse.

YOUNG WOMAN Don't talk nonsense. Go and get some tea *(Common Man smiles and comes out stroking his moustache. He looks around and sets himself up with a beedi and a book. The Young Woman looks up and sits as if immersed in thought. Meanwhile the Young Man peeps into the Old Man's 'room')*

OLD MAN Who is that?

YOUNG MAN It's me. Did you call?

OLD MAN Yes. When did I call and when do you come?

YOUNG MAN I came as soon as I knew you had called me.

OLD MAN *(Contemptuous laughter)* As soon as you knew I had called you! So, it means I have to call you before you come.

YOUNG MAN No, I mean--*(Nonplussed)* No--I said--When you work-

OLD MAN *(Thumping on the table suddenly)* My work! My work! Do you mean to say that I am here to work? If I had been told so earlier, I wouldn't have come even if I was offered a salary of a thousand rupees. Even now, I said no. Was it a mistake to have experience? My work indeed! The job of doing work is yours. Do you understand? Your job is to realise when you need to come to me.

YOUNG MAN No, no--I mean I did realise that and so came.

OLD MAN You should have said that earlier. Really! We were not like this at your age. Let it be. We were there looking after our job even before our seniors told us what to do. Why am I sitting here today? Why am I ringing office bells at an age when I should be thinking about God? It is for you to learn from us how work should be done. Isn't that right?

YOUNG MAN Yes, Sir.

OLD MAN That's fine. How will you take on our responsibility if you behave like this? Only God should look after the country. Are you married?

YOUNG MAN No, Sir.

OLD MAN Don't you see? How can you get experience? How can those who have not experienced domestic life with wife and children, find the joy of coming to an office and working?

YOUNG MAN Yes, Sir.

OLD MAN What was it?

YOUNG MAN How can one understand happiness without experience?

OLD MAN You have understood it now, at last. *(Stopping suddenly as if going on the wrong track)* Never mind about that. What happened about that site?

YOUNG MAN It seems they are not agreeing to the price we have offered.

OLD MAN Who told you that?

YOUNG MAN The broker told me.

OLD MAN *(Disgusted)* Who asked you about the broker? What does the landowner say?

YOUNG MAN We sent for him. He said he wouldn't come.

OLD MAN *(Amazed at the ignorance of the world)* Well, what can I say to you? The job is so important. It is so necessary. Don't you understand what needs to be done? What do you think

building a new society is all about? You can't even get a building for the office constructed. This is a centre which will grow day by day. Thee is no way work can start without it. You have been told all that and you have been shown where you can find a fifty acre lot and yet you have not been able to meet the owner.

YOUNG MAN I can send for him if you like. Perhaps you can go...

OLD MAN *(Interrupting)* What? Should I go there myself?

YOUNG MAN *(Like a drowning man clutching the neck of the man near him)* He might perhaps accept the offer then.

OLD MAN *(Controlling his anger)* If I have to go myself, why does the office need you?

YOUNG MAN *(As a last resort)* May be because I have a special degree--

OLD MAN *(Interrupting)* Burn your special degree! If they had confidence in your special degree why would they fall at my feet and install me here? You have no experience at all! Go, I shall write a letter. Go and send the other person to take dictation.

The Young Man is about to say something, changes his mind, goes back the same way he came in and comes to where Common Man is sitting

YOUNG MAN They say the average life expectancy in India is between twenty six and twenty eight. It is quite false.

COMMON MAN *(Looking up)* What did you say?

YOUNG MAN You must have experience. Even to die.

COMMON MAN Why? Did you talk of something new?

YOUNG MAN Nothing new. The same matter of the fifty acres.

COMMON MAN *(Standing up at once)* What happened?

YOUNG MAN What will happen? The owner will not meet us.

This Old Man does not budge from the price he has quoted.

COMMON MAN Fix it at that price. Why are you obstinate? Tell me. Shall I fix it?

YOUNG MAN *(Taken aback)* Who? You will fix it? *(Losing hope)* But who is the owner of that damned piece of land?

COMMON MAN *(Interrupting)* Don't worry about that. Tell me if you want it fixed.

YOUNG MAN Please do it, you can take the commission as well.

COMMON MAN Commission? For whom?

YOUNG MAN *(Interrupting)* Thirty thousand rupees commission. Not a small amount.

COMMON MAN I asked you who was going to get your commission? I mean, who should not get it. Stop worrying about it. Before day breaks tomorrow *(The Young Man will have come into his room by now)*

YOUNG WOMAN *(Getting up)* My turn has come eventually. Hasn't it?

YOUNG MAN *(Nodding)* Sometimes I wonder whether the story of Mahabharatha will come true.

YOUNG MAN *(Not understanding the context)* which story?

COMMON MAN *(From outside)* Fifty acres, thirty thousands.

YOUNG WOMAN Shikhandi killed Bhishma *(As the Young Woman stares at him)* What it means is that no male can kill the Old Man.

COMMON MAN *(Not paying attention to the Young Woman coming out)* Fifty acres, thirty thousand!

YOUNG WOMAN *(Wonderstruck)* What did you say?

COMMON MAN *(proudly)* Fifty acres, thirty thousand!

YOUNG WOMAN *(Smiling)* In that case, don't forget me.

COMMON MAN That is the sign of a real man.

YOUNG WOMAN What is that?

COMMON MAN *(Continuing what he is saying)* A man should think of his mother when he falls and think of his wife when he wins.

YOUNG MAN Get lost, mad man! *(She starts going to the Old Man's room)*

COMMON MAN *(Looking at her)* If she knew who would marry she wouldn't say such things.

The Old Man rings the bell. The Youn Man throws the file down and lights a cigarette. The Common Man sits down thoughtfully and lights a beedi. The Young Woman, like the two others, hurries to the Old Man's room.

OLD MAN Who is that? *(Sees her peeping in)* Come in. *(Looking at her standing before him)* Sit down.

YOUNG WOMAN I believe you said I had to take something down.

OLD MAN *(Pretending to be surprised)* Taking down? Did I say that?

YOUNG WOMAN He told me-

OLD MAN Who? Our clerk? Is he a fool or is he irresponsible? A special degree to boast of. Did he say that I wanted you take something down? Why are you standing? Sit down *(Looking around)* Goodness, I must have asked a thousand times for a chair.

YOUNG WOMAN Never mind. I can write standing. It's no problem.

OLD MAN Really, what has the country come to? Everybody wants money. No one wants to work; no ambition to move ahead. Even after studying, no business sense *(Looking at her writing)* No, no, don't write that down. I just said it because the occasion arose. *(She tears up the paper, crumples it and throws it where the dustbin should have been)* However, the office has improved a lot. What do you say?

YOUNG MAN *(Comes to the 'door' and speaks to Common Man)* will you bring tea?

OLD MAN There is not enough discipline and neatness. Nevertheless–

YOUNG WOMAN I shall see to it that there is a flower pot on your table.

COMMON MAN *(To the Young Man)* It seems your flower pot hasn't returned yet?

YOUNG MAN *(In a slightly authoritative voice)* What did you say?

OLD MAN If you ask me, there is no need for it. Instead of bringing so many flowers, keeping them in one place and looking at them, there would be greater beauty in the office if you walk around everywhere wearing them. Ha! ha!

COMMON MAN Your partner hasn't come yet.

YOUNG MAN She'll come by the time you bring the tea.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Feeling coy at the Old Man's words)* No- I shall take it down, type it and bring it to you right away.

COMMON MAN How much shall I bring?

OLD MAN *(To the Young Woman)* Bring what?

YOUNG MAN Why do you ask? As much as you always bring *(Moves towards his chair)*

COMMON MAN You mean for three people?

YOUNG MAN *(Turning back and stopping)* How many did you say?

COMMON MAN *(Pointing to the Old Man's room)* I haven't counted him *(Stands up and lights a beedi)*

YOUNG WOMAN *(To the Old Man)* I said I'd type it out and bring it.

OLD MAN Oh, that?

YOUNG WOMAN Please dictate.

YOUNG MAN *(Sitting in the chair)* How long does she take to write it down?

COMMON MAN *(Peeping in)* Did you call me?

OLD MAN What's this? You are still standing?

COMMON MAN *(Looking at the Young Man staring at him)* I am leaving. Right now. *(He stubs the beedi on his foot, pushes it behind his ear and is about to go)*

OLD MAN A chair must be placed here tomorrow. You have to come here so often and spend so much time.

YOUNG WOMAN *(interrupting)* But–*(Coyly)* I feel better standing.

YOUNG MAN What is this? Is she also sitting down there?

OLD MAN *(Smiling)* Do you know how much I appreciate what you said. That is real courtesy. But in my view, it is wrong. This is the only thing that is wrong in government offices. Differentiating between officers and subordinates. No one is superior. Nor is anyone inferior. Everyone is responsible for something. If everyone does what one has to do, then the job is done. Who are the higher ups? Who are the lower downs? *(Looking at the Young Woman writing)* hm–I mean *(She drops and looks at him)* Are you still standing and writing? That's because there is no chair here. I wanted to arrange for you to sit down first and then tell you to take down. The matter is not urgent either *(Patting his pockets)* Damn it! Did I forget my glasses at home?

YOUNG WOMAN Shall I ask the Peon to get them?

YOUNG MAN Will this blessed man ever bring the tea? He is always late. It is all right if he brings it by the time she comes back.

OLD MAN *(As if thinking of something)* Hm... Did this happen as well?

YOUNG MAN But he may bring it early.

OLD MAN No, no, no. Everything is over if he goes. I had forgotten but it is really urgent.

YOUNG WOMAN The peon...

OLD MAN Yes, that's right. Do that.

YOUNG WOMAN The peon...

OLD MAN Tell the peon to take all my files and the typewriter to my house. There's just half an hour's work; you can type there and have it signed as well.

YOUNG WOMAN You say it is urgent. It may be late.

OLD MAN No, no, it is almost time to leave the office. Let him take them right now. We'll follow him.

YOUNG WOMAN In that case, I shall send word to my house.

OLD MAN Why? You can reach home by then.

YOUNG WOMAN Then, I shall tell the peon. *(She walks to her room)*

YOUNG MAN Oh! Is it over at last? *(She is making herself up, looking at the mirror)* Getting made up even to drink tea?

OLD MAN *(Getting up and speaking as if he knew nothing)* Oh! My glasses are here! I shouldn't go home and forget them here. *(He smooths his moustache, feeling proud about his inner thoughts)*

YOUNG MAN This Old Man is coming in the way of what happens after office hours as well. Let us see. *(He stands twirling his moustache. Meanwhile Common Man brings tea and stands twirling his moustache as he watches her looking into the mirror. By then, she gets ready, looks around and goes behind the curtain. The other three stand with their backs towards the spectators*

The Sutradhara enters at the same time, pulling the Leader back as he rushes to the front)

LEADER Damn your play! Let me go, Don't stop me. Such dishonest, insincere, irresponsible–*(The curtain comes down in the meanwhile)*

SUTRADHARA Who? Who are you talking about?

LEADER What does it matter who it is? It is those people. Taking salaries from me, pretending to serve society, spending time serving themselves, these- *(He looks back for the first time and sees nothing)* What? What is this? Where are they?

SUTRADHARA *(Releasing him and speaking calmly)* This is a play. They are characters. They are where characters in a play should be.

LEADER What do you mean? Where?

SUTRADHARA In the greenroom. They are washing off the make-up.

LEADER *(Without understanding)* Washing off the make-up?

SUTRADHARA Yes of course. What did you think? Did you think they were for real?

LEADER What do you mean? What are you saying? That Old Man is not really an old man?

SUTRADHARA *(Nodding and interrupting)* That Old Man is an old man.

LEADER But you say he had been painted up.

SUTRADHARA Yes, But it was not for you.

LEADER For who else then?

SUTRADHARA For the Young Woman in the office.

LEADER *(Taking a deep breath at once)* I understand- you are confused yourself, not knowing which was the play and what really happened.

SUTRADHARA There is no chance for any confusion. Please wait. You are the one getting caught in confusion. You were the one who thought what happened in the play and what was real were different.

LEADER *(Surprised)* What? What did you say?

SUTRADHARA *(Continuing his speech)* But you don't know that what happens is the play and the play is what happens.

LEADER *(Staring at him for a while)* Will you listen to something I say?

SUTRADHARA What is it, Sir?

LEADER I had told you, you may remember. Once upon a time they used to perform plays in the open. Those who wanted would come and watch.

SUTRADHARA Yes.

LEADER After that, entry was by paying money.

SUTRADHARA That's right.

LEADER Now, people will not come to see plays like this even if you pay them.

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* You see Sir, You are still saying the same thing. The ones who watch are not different from the ones that act. Who will come from where to watch?

LEADER In that case why the make--up and taking it off?

SUTRADHARA The private and the public.

LEADER *(Not comprehending)* What are they?

SUTRADHARA The private and the public, inside and outside.

LEADER *(Disdainfully)* Oh, I understand, that Old Man in my office. He is young inside and made up as an Old Man outside; that Young Man is old inside and young outside; the Common Man is a scholar within and ordinary outside; *(Drawing breath with great contempt)* Are you saying that the Young Woman too is a man inside and a woman outside? Private and public indeed!

SUTRADHARA You have left out one more thing. Sri-ranga in public and Saraswathi-Ranga in private. *(Laughing)* It's not like that, Sir. That Old Man is an old man indeed. So are the Young Man, the Common Man and the Young Woman. Are

you satisfied now at least?

LEADER Then, what about private and public...?

SUTRADHARA The man who is old shows off as if he is a young man before the young woman. The man who is young in his own eyes stands bending like an old man before his superior officer. A person who appears ordinary before others is quite extraordinary to himself. A woman who appears young is the image of woman who has existed for thousands of years. Why all this? Let us meet them one by one. *(The curtain is rising at the back. The four characters are standing as they did in the first Act. These two shouldn't look back even by mistake).* They have become what they really are, with the courage of being sure that there is no one to hear them. Come, let us watch from the edge of the stage. Watch.

LEADER *(Looking in front)* Where?

SUTRADHARA Don't look in front *(He turns him around gradually)* Look inside. If the forward looking vision needs to get used to looking inside, it has to learn to look back at first.

LEADER *(The scene appears)* Well...

SUTRADHARA *(Putting his hand on the Leader's mouth)* Ssh... Let us hide. *(Both hide themselves at the right edge of the stage.)*

OLD MAN *(From where he is standing)* Why shouldn't I marry her? She is young and he is young. My span of life--*(Stopping at once)* No, the question doesn't arise at all. Who is old? Who is young? The span of life has no significance in this age where everyone can die because of a single bomb. There is no difference between old and young.

YOUNG MAN Doesn't she even know the different between old and young? Or doesn't she even bother about it? What did she say? That no more children will be born to anyone? What does that mean? No, what sort of talk is that? An old man is after all an old man. A young man is a certainly a young man. Young men have the power called love.

COMMON MAN This thing called love appears in every story. Nevertheless, I feel it is false. When a man wants a woman, you can perhaps call it love. But how can woman have love? A strong man, food to fill the stomach, clothes and ornaments for the body--a woman will go wherever she finds them. God himself has created woman like that. 50 acres of land, commission over 30000--would she give it up today? And am I going to leave her? What more does a woman want?

YOUNG MAN What does this man know what a woman wants? That too, nowadays? Earlier, there was at least the joy of knowing the children belonged to you to forget all the other sorrows! Now, even that is not there. One can have children without any relationship. One can have relationships without children. *(The Leader shuts his ears and stands facing the audience.)*

YOUNG WOMAN Really, I don't want the Old Man whose looks put me to sleep. I don't want the Young Man, who hangs on to love. I want... *(The curtain at the back falls)*

LEADER *(Silence for a while. He takes his hands off his ears. Keeps looking ahead)* Has the talking stopped?

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* It's over at last!

LEADER What did you say? *(Turns back suddenly and sees nothing)* What's this?

SUTRADHARA I told you the Act was over.

LEADER The Act is over? So the play isn't yet over then...

End of The Second Act

ACT THREE

SUTRADHARA It isn't over. The third Act is starting.

LEADER *(Staring at him)* Amazing. I said amazing.

SUTRADHARA What is amazing, Sir?

LEADER You have either too much courage or too little modesty.

SUTRADHARA Why, Sir? Are you angry because I was the only one to overstep and stand against you?

LEADER *(Ignoring him and continuing his speech)* Well- getting men and women together in this way, in this manner-

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* That is the responsibility of God who made the world, getting men and women together.

LEADER *(Carrying on with his speech)* Getting them together and using unmentionable words, secret matters-

SUTRADHARA *(Immediately placing his hand on the Leader's mouth)* Hold on, Sir, hold on. What a false accusation you are making!

LEADER *(Angered)* False accusation? Hundreds of spectators are witness here. Ask them.

SUTRADHARA *(Looking at the auditorium)* There is no one there.

LEADER *(As if insulted)* No one? You can see them right before your eyes.

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* I can see rows of human bodies. But you can't call them audience. They were rendered static there at the beginning of the play and they have moved to the stage. They have entered others' bodies and are lifeless there.

LEADER Damn your idea of entry into other bodies. You can say 'lifeless'. Whose life will not fly away listening to the words of the Young Woman?

SUTRADHARA What was so terrible in what she said?

LEADER *(Surprised)* What was there? Unspeakable! Disgusting!

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* What was unspeakable? Who found it disgusting? Think about it, Sir. If you speak before people, it becomes obscene. How can it be so when it is only thought of?

LEADER *(Uncomprehending)* Only thought of?

SUTRADHARA Of course what else? All those four characters were in their own homes, in the privacy of their rooms and expressed thoughts in their own minds. What did you lose by that? Pardon me, Sir, for having touched your property. But it had to be said, so that other propertied leaders would also realise it quickly. You say you won't give an opportunity to be honest in business or before people. Why should you object to these poor characters speaking to themselves about matters that concern them? Or do you feel unbearably angry because the play is giving them freedom of thought which you cannot? Don't you even have enough patience to watch the play fully?

LEADER If you have balance, I have patience.

SUTRADHARA Balance? In what?

LEADER In your characters and the words that come out of their mouths-

SUTRADHARA *(Laughing aloud)* Sir, those characters are not mine. They are yours. The responsibility for what they say is not mine. It is yours.

LEADER *(Instantly, with surprise)* Have you gone mad? I am talking about the characters in the play. You- *(Stopping at once, seeing the Sutradara staring at him)* I know; you'll start a lecture saying the play is not yours and you are not responsible for having it performed.

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* You guessed right. The play up to now is all yours.

LEADER *(As if inevitable)* You have said this a hundred times and I too listened. I presumed that it was the way you talked. But it is too much now *(Intent upon setting things right once for all)* Now say it clearly for once. Some one wrote the play and some one is having it performed by someone else. How can it be mine? How? Say it clearly. Let this madness end once for all.

SUTRADHARA *(As if soothing)* Patience, Have patience, Sir.

LEADER *(Obstinately)* No, let it end once for all. Go on.

SUTRADHARA *(Trying to pacify him, with a smile on the face and a gesture with his uplifted hand)* I shall tell you! I shall! I shall tell you even if you don't ask me. Have patience. If I don't, it will be impossible for me to add on my happy ending to your tragic play.

LEADER What? What did you say? You said something new.

SUTRADHARA I said, 'For your tragic play'.

LEADER Play? Mine? And that too, a tragedy?

SUTRADHARA Yes. But the last scene is our own. It ends happily.

LEADER *(Addressing the audience)* Did you hear that, brothers and sisters? The play you have been seeing, it seems, is mine and a tragedy!

SUTRADHARA Who are you talking to over there? What is sitting there is a row of lifeless bodies.

LEADER Oh! This is yet another complication.

SUTRADHARA No, not a complication; I can infuse life into those lifeless creatures in a moment; I am not one to annihilate energy like you. I am the one who revitalizes.

LEADER Talk, keep talking; I shall keep quiet as long as you blabber something that I don't understand.

SUTRADHARA *(Catching hold of him firmly and making him stand before him like a student being taught, smiling at the traces of fear in his face)* I shall speak so that you can understand. Be still.

LEADER *(As if enchanted)* Witchcraft!

SUTRADHARA *(Insistently)* No.

LEADER *(Trying to face the audience)* No? You are seeing it yourself--

SUTRADHARA *(Making the Leader face him)* No, no, no. Why are you torturing those lifeless objects with your speech? They have turned deaf listening to your speech which went on endlessly. They have lost their tongue because you alone spoke. If this had gone on, they might have lost their lives for ever. So, to stop that from happening, I carried those creatures from there and kept them on the stage here. You might perhaps know this. Live human creatures pick up lifeless dolls as play things. That is in human creation. It is quite the opposite in God's creation; there God gives life to lifeless things considering them toys. Breaking a toy is not a game. It is doing harm. You, the Leader, are engaged in mischief. You raise the call of peace and start killing through war. You encourage people to fly in the sky and manufacture a weapon to trample them underground. You spread the madness that search for knowledge is a great thing and make intellectuals your slaves. Your mischief–making *(Pointing to the auditorium)* shouldn't break those dolls. That's why I have brought them on to this stage.

LEADER Have you finished? And you say that I am the one to belt out speeches.

SUTRADHARA You could have belted out one. But, I–the playwright, the Sutradhara will not bend before you. You cannot buy me; I am an obstacle for your mischief.

LEADER Oh, I see. My mischief is tragedy. Your comedy is an obstacle. Is that right?

SUTRADHARA Obstacle? *(Laughing)* Sir, come. I shall show you the sweetness of comedy; give a chance for the play on the stage. Come along. *(The curtain at the back goes up. The scene has*

changed. The Old Man is writing something. The Young Man is busy with corpentering? The arrangement of screens has changed. The arrangement of curtains has changed. All of them indicate the house of the Common Man. The Old Man and the Young Man are working in the open. Their clothing supports their lower status.)

LEADER Where?

SUTRADHARA *(Making him stand facing the scene)* Look! Walk in the footsteps of a follower at least once.

He walks behind making the other walk as well and disappears at the right side. Now the scene is clearly visible to the audience. Two screens on the right indicate the walls of the house. They are both equidistant from the auditorium. The third curtain is at a little distance away to the left. It shouldn't come to the centre of the stage at right angles. The area in between these three curtains is the inside of the house. Outside the house, in the middle of the stage, the Old Man is seated on a chair and is writing at the table. To the left of the audience, the Young Man is carrying on with his carpentry.

There is total silence for a while. The Common Man comes out of the house, lights a beedi and looks around. Then he comes outside the third curtain and slaps the Old Man's back; the Old Man is startled and looks up.

COMMON MAN *(Smiling)* Still not used to it, Ajja? How many years have you rung the bell in the government office? How are things?

OLD MAN They are going on quiet well.

COMMON MAN There is no problem in employing a man like you, Ajja! A chair, a table, paper, pencil, ink, pen. That's enough to start you off. Ha, ha! If you have to leave the world one day you won't go to meet the Lord of Death, Yamaraya, without a table and a chair. Right? Leave it be, what do the accounts say?

OLD MAN *(Proudly)* The plan I make or the accounts I keep will never ever let anyone down.

COMMON MAN Even as you kept saying it over and over again, you turned the office upside down.

OLD MAN *(Taking a deep breath)* I was cheated. I didn't get even an inkling that you were the owner of those fifty acres of land.

COMMON MAN If you had known, you would, possibly have taken a bribe from me.

OLD MAN But lost my job for nothing. The pension has gone as well. *(Takes a deep breath again)*

COMMON MAN What do you lack here?

OLD MAN *(Getting back to work again)* Nothing, I should say.

COMMON MAN That's fine then.

(For a while, both are quiet. Common Man is engrossed in thought. He throws away his beedi, lights another, stares at the smoke for a moment and appears to have arrived at a decision eventually) Oh, yes. Ajja, I shall tell you something. Food to eat and an open ground to run around when you are young, later a woman for companionship, after that, children to manage. This is enough for a man.

OLD MAN *(Continuing to work)* That's the life of an animal.

COMMON MAN What else do you think you are then?

OLD MAN *(Raising his head in surprise)* What did you say?

COMMON MAN When I say you, it is not only you; It's you, him, and myself–people on the whole.

OLD MAN *(Obstinately)* After all man is man and an animal is an animal. Man has intelligence.

COMMON MAN *(Appearing to be thinking)* Yes. He has that too. But an animal doesn't have the wit to kill some one intentionally and often for no reason at all.

OLD MAN *(Shaking his head)* No– There is no way you'll understand the matter.

COMMON MAN What do you mean? I have no intelligence? Ajja, if I had no intelligence would I have sold fifty acres of land and saved half an acre for myself? How was that possible?

OLD MAN *(Amazed)* What did you say?

COMMON MAN Look! You know that boy. I told him to play a trick while measuring; he did so. I had fifty acres. The government brought fifty acres too. I was left with half an acre in the end. Ha, ha! Do you call this poor arithmetic, Ajja?

OLD MAN No-- No-- That's cheating.

COMMON MAN But who was the one that cheated?

OLD MAN But it was you who told him to cheat.

COMMON MAN I did. I thought half an acre would remain if I took away fifty from fifty. I am so stupid. Are you saying stupidity is a crime? What you are doing now is different. This could perhaps be called cheating.

OLD MAN I? A cheat? What Have I done?

COMMON MAN Aren't you building a house for me with sub-standard material?

OLD MAN No, No, Not for you.

COMMON MAN I was wrong. Say you are building it on my behalf, so that I can earn rent.

OLD MAN That's right, But have we made an agreement with the tenant that we would only use good material?

COMMON MAN *(As if caught in thought)* Yes. That's true as well. Some times intelligence is useful. That's not a lie. Leave it be, Ajja. How much did you say each house would cost?

OLD MAN Probably ten thousand.

COMMON MAN How much rent would I get?

OLD MAN May be a hundred.

COMMON MAN *(Calculating)* The total expenditure is ten thousand. Rent is a hundred. So in ten years the total expenditure *(Stopping as the Old Man laughs aloud suddenly)* Why? Have I gone wrong even in this small calculation?

OLD MAN *(Controlling his laughter)* Great man! One hundred is not the yearly rent. Hundred rupees per month. 12%

COMMON MAN *(Amazed)* Hundred rupees per month!

OLD MAN Do you now realise how clear cut my work is? Experience, experience is necessary for everything. My experience in running the family on allowances and sending the entire salary to the bank.

COMMON MAN *(Interrupting)* Do you mean that you do it even here?

OLD MAN *(Surprised)* Here? What do you mean by saying doing it even here?

COMMON MAN Oh, forget it. We will see to it later. But I shall tell you one thing. You know my nature, don't you? Whatever the work, it must be finished then and there.

OLD MAN *(Surprised)* What? What did you say?

COMMON MAN *(Laughing suddenly)* Ha, ha! do you remember something Ajja? We cannot waste time. Do you understand? Ha! Ha! Ha *(as he laughs aloud, the Young Woman comes out. She is now his wife. He looks at her)* What is it?

YOUNG WOMAN You laughed so suddenly. I wondered what had happened.

COMMON MAN *(To the Old Man)* Did you see Ajja? A wife must be like this. If I cry, she must ask me why I cried. If I laugh she must ask me why I laughed. Otherwise, for whose sake should a man laugh or cry? Ha, ha, ha *(As he laughs, he winks at the Young Man who looks at him)* Hey, look here. If you find a bell lying around in the house, hide it. If not, Ajja will just sit ringing the bell, and talk about experience over and over again. Let him finish his work right away. *(He goes near the Young Man and stands watching him work)*

YOUNG WOMAN *(To the Old Man)* You know what he is like!

COMMON MAN How is your special degree getting on?

OLD MAN *(To the Young Man)* Bad luck!

YOUNG MAN *(To the Common Man)* I am chopping it over and over again and raising splinters.

YOUNG WOMAN *(To the Old Man)* Don't take it so much to heart.

COMMON MAN *(To the Young Man)* Why do you take it so much to heart, Young Man?

YOUNG MAN *(To the Common Man)* Cheating in every way.

OLD MAN *(To the Young Woman)* Didn't I say it was bad luck?

COMMON MAN *(To the Young Man)* No, No! Everyone learnt and you did so too. Where does cheating come in this?

OLD MAN *(To the Young Woman)* Pure cheating. I did something. The result was something else.

YOUNG WOMAN *(To the Old Man)* Did you do it knowing full well what you were doing? Why do you bother?

YOUNG MAN *(To the Common Man)* You know you did what you were doing intentionally. You still ask me where the cheating came from.

OLD MAN *(To the Young Woman)* It is true that I didn't do it knowingly.

YOUNG WOMAN *(In a consoling voice)* Does time ask when it should arrive? *(Both are lost in their own thoughts)*

COMMON MAN *(To the Young Man in a soothing voice)* I did nothing. It was a bad time for you.

YOUNG MAN Bad time didn't come on its own. You brought it. You didn't even tell me that you were the owner of this land.

COMMON MAN What would you have done if I had told you? You would have cheated me as you cheated the government.

YOUNG MAN How did I cheat the government?

COMMON MAN Measuring fifty acres, leaving out half an acre? Wasn't that cheating? Listen to me. I shall tell you why you are angry with me. You have cheated. I have cheated as well. But I showed you that you don't need a special degree to cheat. That's why you are angry. Isn't that right?

YOUNG MAN Don't disparage my degree. That's my strongest weapon. That's why I am not afraid of anyone. I am not scared even of you. What do you think I am? If you speak without care, I shall leave here. I can go where I want. I shall show my degree. Whoever pays me more--

COMMON MAN *(Interrupting)* Sell it to them! Ha, ha, ha! That's living like an animal.

YOUNG MAN *(Taken aback)* What did you say?

COMMON MAN That's entirely the life of an animal. A pet dog and a tethered cow do the same. Without a degree. That's why I said it was the life of an animal. *(Laughing suddenly, looking back at the Old Man)* Ajja, I have returned your own words to you, haven't I?

YOUNG MAN *(To the Old Man)* What was that?

YOUNG WOMAN *(To the Common Man)* What was it?

COMMON MAN *(Laughing)* You won't understand, you are just a kid.

OLD MAN *(Like a philosopher)* What would happen to the people in this world if what he said was really true. Rice to eat, a field to cultivate, a woman for survival, children to perish--*(Something strikes him suddenly)* No, no, no. He didn't say it like that. He said it quite differently.

YOUNG WOMAN *(To the Old Man)* What did he say? Tell me.

OLD MAN *(To the Young Woman)* He talked about you.

YOUNG MAN *(To Common Man)* Your time has come now. And you are talking. Go on.

COMMON MAN *(To the Young Man)* My time hasn't come on its own, boy. I have brought it with me. Hahaha! It is my turn to return your own words to you, hahaha!

YOUNG WOMAN *(Approaching the Common Man)* What has amused you so much?

COMMON MAN Here! Look at these two. *(Showing the Young Man and the Old Man)* Do you see? They make a living because of me and they give me words of advice. Do you know why? They are educated and want to eduacte me as well. This is because I married you after pushing them back. Don't I know them? When you lose, they try to give you their advice. When you win, they twist your ears. Your job is to slog, slog away. I'll go for a walk. Hey, Young Man, do you think I shall bring you tea because I am going out? Hahaha! *(He exits from the left of the audience)*

YOUNG MAN Chee! Idiot! Pure animal!

YOUNG WOMAN *(Taken aback)* who?

OLD MAN *(Stands where he is and speaks as if to himself)* If what he says is true...

YOUNG MAN What does it matter? I still feel prickly all over when I think of your marrying him.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Smiling)* I know. You were scared that I might marry the Old Man.

YOUNG MAN *(As if insulted)* Scared? I?

OLD MAN *(As before)* If there is truth in the world...

YOUNG WOMAN *(Suddenly addressing the Young Man)* Do you know why I married him? Shall I tell you the story?

YOUNG MAN I am not eager to listen to stories of adultery.

YOUNG WOMAN They said the same thing--at that time.

OLD MAN *(As before. In a voice revealing that he cannot control himself any longer)* If what he said was true, what would be the condition of man on earth?

YOUNG MAN *(Amazed)* The same words! Who--who told you this? When?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Face brightening at remembering)* That day, hadn't we all come together to see this place? As we were looking around, the two of you went near that tree over there, to discuss something sceretly. I stood alone by this wall! There were clouds wandering in the sky. I was walking about looking up at the sky because it was so beautiful. I didn't know there was a broken stump and a pit ahead. Then this house and the wall weren't there. I was looking up and walking... *(Stops abruptly as she becomes aware of the Young Man staring at her. Smiles as if tired)* Why? Why are you looking at me like that?

YOUNG MAN It happened seven or eight years ago. You talk as if it happened yesterday or the day before-

YOUNG WOMAN *(Amazed)* Seven or eight years! Really so far back--

YOUNG MAN *(Contemptuously)* You are a mother of four now. Don't you remember!

YOUNG WOMAN I don't know. It still feels as if it happened yesterday or the day before. *(Suddenly)* What was I saying?

YOUNG MAN *(As above)* It was nothing big. You were looking up and walking. Right in front of you there was a pit.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Speaking as before)* Oh, Yes. If I had taken a step further, I would have fallen into it. Then, all of a sudden, from somewhere, he came and stood before me, gazing at me as you are doing now. Then, I broke into a sweat. I felt as if I had woken up all of a sudden. I looked and saw him standing, smiling. 'Shall I tell you what you were thinking about?' He asked. I stood still not knowing what to do. 'You were looking at the sky,' he said. I could find no words. I don't know whether I said 'yes' or just nodded as if listening to a story. 'Do you know the story of the earth and the sky?', he asked. I must have looked bewildered. 'Why

are you so scared? If you say you don't know, I shall tell you. Sit down,' he said. He took me by the hand and made me sit on the dry, broken stump. 'Listen I shall tell you. The earth and the sky never stay apart. Each should exist for the other. They are so closely knit. One of them might forget itself gazing at the other sometimes. The earth goes up and becomes the sky. At other times, the sky comes down and turns into earth. When they are in harmony with each other, cattle, food and clothing-- a new world is born. 'Why did you tell me this story now?' I asked him. Do you know what he said? 'You are the earth and I am the sky'

OLD MAN *(As if speaking to himself but fairly loudly)* perhaps what he said was true. But if that was really the truth, the men and women in the world-- *(He stops as if confused)*

YOUNG WOMAN *(As if absorbed in her own story)* Earth, Sky--

YOUNG MAN *(Rebellious and loud)* deceit, deceit, deceit!

OLD MAN *(Waking up)* Who is that? Who are you?

YOUNG MAN *(Surprised)* What? What did you say? Who am I? Ha ha ha! In that case, who are you? *(He starts walking towards the Old Man)*

YOUNG WOMAN *(Stopping him half--way)* Sh! Don't you understand?

YOUNG MAN (Angrily) What?

YOUNG WOMAN Don't you understand? Don't you see?

YOUNG MAN *(Looking at the man for a moment and in a contemptuous voice)* Hm... It appears as if his end is near. The body is getting stiff. There doesn't seem to be life left anywhere except in the face. Is life gradually leaving him?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Smiling)* Don't you understand?

YOUNG MAN *(Angrily)* I know, I know, I know! The Old Man is dying. How unfortunate I am!

YOUNG WOMAN *(Taken aback)* What did you say?

YOUNG MAN I said I was unfortunate. This Old Man is dying now. If he had died eight or ten years ago! In the Old days people became old and died. If the father happened to be a king, he would crown his grown--up son and go away to a forest, retiring from life as soon as children were married. People in those days would accept *sanyas* as soon as they saw the faces of their grand children. That was perhaps why those were good times. Look what is happening now. Look at this Old Man himself. He is still working, earning. He is wiping away with his sweat the future of people like me. Is he dying now! Had he died eight or ten years ago...

YOUNG WOMAN *(Interrupting)* You would have become old.

YOUNG MAN What? What did you say?

YOUNG WOMAN As long as those who came before remain old, those that come after remain young. Now if this Old Man dies--

YOUNG MAN *(Looking at him)* Signs of his death are appearing.

OLD MAN *(From where he sits like a statue)* Idiot!

YOUNG MAN *(Taken aback)* What?

YOUNG WOMAN Sh! Look *(The Old Man acts in keeping with her words)* See how he is trying to get up! Poor man! Who knows when his limbs stopped moving. The whole body is like a log. Look! Look! He has stood up. What is this? He is walking forward. With his eyes closed as well. Sh! Wait, Wait, Wait! His legs are moving like oxen which keep moving even when the driver sleeps. See! His lips are moving. What could he be saying? Oh is he trying to say something? *(Both stand watching. The Old Man comes to the front of the stage facing the audience as before)*

OLD MAN Who am I? Who are you? Ha ha! Idiot! You and I. We are not two. We are just one. Today it is I, yesterday it was you. What I am today is what you will be tomorrow!

YOUNG MAN *(In a scared voice)* 'What I am today is what you will be tomorrow'? What is this he is telling me? I am scared by his words.

YOUNG WOMAN Why? He said, 'It was I today and you yesterday'

YOUNG MAN *(Not comprehending)* What does that mean?

YOUNG WOMAN Me.

YOUNG MAN *(Taken aback)* What did you say?

YOUNG MAN *(Slightly scared)* What is this? Am I caught in the company of lunatics?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Laughing)* Why? Why are you so scared? It was you who said I am a mother of four. Today a mother, yesterday a wife. That's why I thought it was me.

OLD MAN I–You! Haha! Fools! Who am I? Idiots! Me, an Old Man? Perfect idiots! I am not old; I shall endure. I shall live for ever. I am time moving endlessly lighting up yesterday and today. I am the wheel of time treading on the ground over and over again and making new paths.

YOUNG MAN *(A little more scared)* Time! Wheel of time!

OLD MAN I am the wheel of time. I am time-- I am the wheel of time *(Mumbles on and walks back to stand behind a chair as in the First Act. The mumbling stops and lips are closed. The Young Man looks at this for a while like one struck dumb. Eventually, when the Old Man stands perfectly still-)*

YOUNG WOMAN Poor Man!

YOUNG MAN *(In a whisper)* Is he dead? Really? No, no. He may not have died. If he did, I'd have to become old. I am not old. No. I cannot die. I won't die. I--

YOUNG WOMAN *(Consoling)* Stay calm- Stay calm. Wait. No one is going to die.

YOUNG MAN *(Like a drowning man who is saved)* Will no one die? That means he is not dead! I-

YOUNG WOMAN *(Interrupting)* No one will die. You have said so yourself. We have progressed today. Science has increased man's power. Man is becoming God.

YOUNG MAN I? Did I say that? No, I might have blabbed something long time ago in a fit of enthusiasm.

YOUNG WOMAN The time has come for the blabbing to come true. No one need die anymore. It is as if we have conquered Death.

YOUNG MAN *(In a hopeful voice)* What? What are you saying? Is it true? Have we conquered Death?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Unmindful, continuing her talk)* Those that exist live and death will be for the dead.

YOUNG MAN *(Uncomprehending)* What? What was that? Who are the living? Who are the dead?

YOUNG WOMAN If the living exist, the dead die. From now on that situation will not arise. Man is gaining power enough to see no one survives and everyone dies! If everyone dies at the same moment, where does death come from?

YOUNG MAN *(As if memorising the matter)* If everyone dies at the same moment where did death come from? If the living exist, the dead die! If everyone dies at the same moment... *(Faces the audience from where he stands)*... If the living exist... Where did death come from?... Death for the dead... If the living die at the same moment... Where did death come from for the dead? From where? From where? *(Mumbling, the too gradually comes to the front of the stage. The Young Woman stands staring at him. Silence for a couple of minutes. The Young Man's lips are moving. Common Man enters talking).*

COMMON MAN Here! I have brought your tea. *(Looking at the scene suddenly)* Goodness! What is this? *(Looking at everything carefully and understanding everything)* Hm... Eventually, there was too much water for the roots.

YOUNG MAN *(As he stands)* Where from?

COMMON MAN *(Startled)* What did you say?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Gesticulating)* Sh! Sh!

COMMON MAN Well, he said something. I said there was too much water for the roots and he asked where from!

YOUNG WOMAN *(Explaining)* He didn't ask you.

COMMON MAN If he didn't ask me, who else was he asking? I was the one that talked.

YOUNG MAN *(As before)* Too much water for the root! Ha ha!

COMMON MAN There! Didn't you hear him as well?

YOUNG WOMAN Sh... I didn't hear.

COMMON MAN *(Taken aback)* What did you say?

YOUNG WOMAN That wasn't speech.

COMMON MAN It wasn't speech? What do you mean?

YOUNG WOMAN It wasn't speech? It was reflection. We'll hear it only after he understands it himself. *(Stops suddenly)* Look! He is asking himself! Did you see that?

COMMON MAN *(Wipes the sweat off his forehead after looking at her, scared)*

YOUNG MAN *(As before)* Idiots! Ha ha! Too much water for the roots! Ha ha! The root is getting stronger. The water is receding. The root goes down. Water goes up. Hahaha! Too much water for the root? Too much?

Mumbles. Doing so, he comes near another chair and stands facing the audience. His lips are moving

YOUNG WOMAN *(To Common Man)* Did you hear him?

COMMON MAN I can see the lips moving. Well, even that has stopped! *(The Young Man stands still)* I think there was too much water for the root. Poor thing! If the plant had grown bigger, there would have been no problem with water being more or less. But how can one withstand too much intelligence when one is still growing up. There! The figure has gone stiff. It dried up even before it could grow!

YOUNG WOMAN *(As if to herself)* How can it withstand it? Too much intelligence when it was still growing.

COMMON MAN *(With the pride of knowing everything)* If one wishes to grow, there should be the resoluteness to turn the face

towards the sun. If one wishes to grow, there should be courage to send the root down into the darkness of the earth's womb.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Walking to the edge of the stage mechanically)* Resoluteness is needed. Courage is needed.

COMMON MAN *(Enthusiastic about his own words)* These follows? As soon as they are born, they get ready for death. Haha! Hurry. Hurry to die. Hurry to kill even those that want to live. *(Suddenly realising the Young Man has come forward and is rushing towards her)* Hey, what's this? Why are you doing this? Come, let us go in. Why don't the dead die? They want... *(He tries to hold her hand and indicates that she is also becoming stiff. He draws his hand back and screams)*

YOUNG WOMAN *(Mechanically)* Why don't the dead die? They wanted it?... Ha, ha. I too want it. I want to die so that others can live. I too want that happiness. I want the joy of dying after giving birth to new life. I shall go down to the darkness of earth--womb. There will be a new sprout... I will soar to the sun. Let the new come from there. It is only when the living go on living that the dead feel the joy of dying... Joy... *(She walks on mumbling. Common Man follows her longingly like a boy who has lost his way)*

COMMON MAN Hey, look here. Oh, damn! Let's live. Even if just only the two of us survive, let us live. Let there be four more children. Let us live! Let us live to see the happiness of our children! Let us live to see the faces of our grand-children! Let us see the children that are born, play with them and become children again--become new again *(By this time, the Young Woman is standing facing the audience by the side of a stool. Common Man stands looking at her face. She is mumbling).*

YOUNG WOMAN *(Mumbling)* I... Again... New... *(She becomes still)*

COMMON MAN (Not noticing it but trying to enthuse her) Yes, Yes- Let us live. Let us become children again... Let us become new again. *(Stopping suddenly)* Damn! Perhaps I too have become too clever by being in their company *(Noticing that she has become still)* Hey! *(Not being able to understand anything, he faces the audience)*... Yes... They say a man is known by the

company he keeps. So, I must die since all my companions have died. *(Shaking his head)* No, I shouldn't allow my thoughts too much room. *(Mumbling)* No use. Must work and eat; eat and work, work and get tired; get tired and sleep, wake up and work *(He comes to the front of the stage as in the first Act, mechanically)* One must work, eat, get tired and sleep and leave no time for thoughts. If you don't do that, calculations begin. When working, the joy of eating, when tired, the joy of sleeping. That is what happiness is, like an eluding woman. Shouldn't lose her. Joy if she escapes, joy if she accepts. What joy when sorrow is overcome! What joy! *(He comes mumbling to the other side of the stool and faces the audience)* What joy! *(He mumbles, moves his lips and stands still)*

The stage is quiet and motionless The Leader, his head bent as if he is lost in thought and the Sutradhara, looking at him, appear on the stage. They come to the centre

LEADER *(Looking back)* Hm... Is the play over at last?

SUTRADHARA *(Shaking his head)* No.

LEADER *(Surprised)* Not yet? *(As if something strikes him suddenly)* Even that is possible. The question of ending arises if there has been a beginning.

SUTRADHARA What did you say?

LEADER *(Smiling contemptuously)* I said the question of ending arises if there is a beginning. Without an end or a beginning this play will never be over.

SUTRADHARA You guessed right, Sir.

LEADER *(With an angry expression)* 'Right'? What do you think I said?

SUTRADHARA *(Politely)* What did you say, Sir?

LEADER *(With unchecked contempt)* I said that this is not a play at all. So where is the question of it ending?

SUTRADHARA You guessed right, Sir.

LEADER *(Puzzled)* What did you say?

SUTRADHARA I said you guessed right.

LEADER Yes. You said so and I heard it. But you keep saying, 'right, right' to whatever I say. Then I'll tell you something else. Listen.

SUTRADHARA Please say it, Sir.

LEADER Do you know who wrote this play?

SUTRADHARA Yes, Sir.

LEADER Did you see him writing it?

SUTRADHARA Yes, Sir. I have even told him what to write many times.

LEADER Let that be. How did he write it?

SUTRADHARA What did you say?

LEADER I asked you how he wrote it.

SUTRADHARA I don't understand, Sir.

LEADER *(Obstinately)* If you don't, let me tell you; I'll tell you even things that you don't know. I know. He was standing on his head when he wrote it.

SUTRADHARA *(Taken aback)* What did you say?

LEADER *(Even more obstinately)* I said your playwright has written this standing on his head.

SUTRADHARA *(With a smile as if he has understood now)* Oh! Do you say that what is in this is upside down?

LEADER What do you think?

SUTRADHARA *(In a dignified voice)* It is better to die and be immortal than live and be mortal. That is what I think.

LEADER *(Suddenly laughing aloud)* Great! Great! The playwright must be related to you by blood. Otherwise it would not have been possible for you to speak such unrelated and meaningless words with such ease. Haha! It is better to die and be immortal than live and be mortal? Haha! But, Sutradhara! Who lives in this? Who dies?

SUTRADHARA The play ends only after that is decided, Sir.

LEADER What more is there to happen? These are already dead *(He looks back to find that the curtain has fallen and the scene has completely disappeared)* Hey! What is this?

SUTRADHARA What? What is it, Sir?

LEADER Those four people have died.

SUTRADHARA Which four people, Sir?

LEADER Which people? Those lifeless dolls at the beginning, those people! Those four characters in the play. Those four people. Those who turned into lifeless figures at the end of the play. I mean people who stood like that.

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* Pardon me, Sir. Since you were also inside it, may be you were not able to see clearly. No one died!

LEADER That Old Man, that Young Man, the Young Woman, the Common Man.

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* Are they not everywhere?

LEADER *(Obstinately)* No, not those. These people. I mean the people here on the stage.

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* Your inner thoughts must have affected your vision. You wanted all these to die and you must have seen them dead.

LEADER What did you say? Do you say that living people appeared like dead people to me?

SUTRADHARA Why shouldn't they appear so, Sir? One may be dead. But one may see oneself living.

LEADER *(Angered)* Hey, Sutradhara, Are you saying that I am alive but still dead and those that have died are alive? I am alive, not dead. Do you understand? I am alive, not dead.

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* Those that inhabit the kingdom of the dead are ghosts.

LEADER What do you mean? I am a ghost? No, No. I am not a ghost. They are the dead ones and I am alive. I am the only one alive in the kingdom of the dead. *(Suddenly)* No, no. Not even that, I am-- I am--

SUTRADHARA *(Very courteously)* Who are you, Sir?

LEADER (Bewildered) I am-- I am--

SUTRADHARA I shall tell you what you are. Listen, Janamejaya, Protector of the Earth. The blind king listened to Vidura's teachings and attained purity of the mind.

LEADER Then?

SUTRADHARA Then he said, now tell me what is the essence of *atmavidys*, true knowledge of the self.

LEADER Who?

SUTRADHARA The blind king.

LEADER Who is that?

SUTRADHARA You.

LEADER What! *(Taken aback, he stands still)*

SUTRADHARA You are blind. You are the king. But now a blind man doesn't follow a blind man *(The curtain at the back rises. All the four come as live characters and hold the Leader's hand. He acts like a blind man who doesn't know the way).* O blind king, you wanted every one else to die and loved to listen to stories of death, but now these people who are determined to live are leading you to the right path. Go...! *(All the four hold the leader's hand and take him across the stage. All the five get down to the auditorium from the stage)*

SUTRADHARA Oh, Life has come down to the auditorium from the stage. The play is now over. Isn't it?

Curtain

The Play Has Ended

SANJIVANI

(1961)

Translated by Usha Desai



Preface

The title of this play, its story and its characters (excepting the Sutradhara, the Nata and the Disciples) are taken from the *Sambhavaparva* of the *Mahabharata*. About twentyfive years ago, I wrote two brief scenes called 'Yayati' and 'Devayani', but there is nothing in common between them and the present play except an indication that the story and the characters have remained with me all these years.

I have borrowed several words and phrases from the *Mhaabharata* for the dialogues of this play and have made use of *slokas* from the original in suitable places. I have retained the story of the *Mahabharata*, including a few things which may appear to be improbable as it is but I had to reject childish fictions such as Yayati's second meeting with Devayani hundreds of years after the first meeting or his union with Sharmistha thousands of years after he married Devayani.

I have taken the material from other sources but the work fashioned out of it is entirely new and my own creation. I have interpreted the original story in my own way. The question whether my interpretation is correct or not is irrelevant to me. The motive behind

the new interpretation is to express my own experience and thought. The story which is known to everyone has served me as an art-language common to me and the audience/readers and a medium of the exchange of experience.

In view of the fact that the unlimited expanse of the human mind itself is the theatre here and the major part of the action takes place in an ashrama-like environment, I have refrained from drawing limits to the stage or providing elaborate stage instructions. When heroes from mythology move about on the stage and fill it there can be no room for others. As regards costumes, the pictures included in the edition of the *Mahabharata* published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute of Pune may prove to be helpful.

The question whether plays like the present one can be produced on the Kannada stage didn't occur to me before writing and I see no sense in raising it now. 'Time is endless and the earth vast' : *Kalohyayam niravadhirvipula ca prthvi.*

Sriranga

CHARACTERS

Sutradhara, Actor (Nataraya)

Shukracharya

Devayani

Kacha

Yayati

Sharmishtha

King Vrishaparva

Disciples of Shukracharya

Puru, Yadu

Turvasu, Druhyu. Anu, Voices.



Sutradhara enters and walks across the front of the stage. The rest of the stage is not clearly visible

SUTRADHARA *(Calling out to someone ahead)* Nataraya, hey, Nataraya!

ACTOR *(Enters and folds hands)* Command me, my lord Sutradhara!

SUTRADHARA *(With a smile)* The command has already been given by our masters--the audience. They want to see a play as beautiful as a poem, as enlightening as the Shastras, as truthful as the Vedanta and as pleasing to the eyes as nature itself.

ACTOR So, how many plays do you intend to perform?

SUTRADHARA What do you mean how many?

ACTOR You spoke of so many qualities–how can you get them all in one play?

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupts with a smile)* You don't have to worry about that! You may ask any playwright. I'm sure he'll assure you that his plays have not only these qualities, but many more.

ACTOR *(Doubtfully)* But don't you think the audience will find us out?

SUTRADHARA *(Still smiling)* Well, doesn't our art require us to perform as if the audience understands nothing?

ACTOR Tell me then which play to enact. I'll get things ready.

SUTRADHARA Which play?

ACTOR Which play!

SUTRADHARA That's what I asked you.

ACTOR *(Laughing)* Oh! I thought 'Which play' was the name of a play.

SUTRADHARA *(After some thought)* Okay–let's do it this way.

ACTOR Command me.

SUTRADHARA Let's look for inspiration–like the dramatist.

ACTOR *(Not understanding)* What do you mean?

SUTRADHARA They say the dramatist has no idea what he's going to write, that he writes as inspiration makes him.

ACTOR But how do we get inspiration?

SUTRADHARA Let's fold our hands, close our eyes and with total involvement get the inspiration we need through prayer.

They stand that way. Sutradhara begins reciting. Actor repeats just a word or so.

SUTRADHARA *Narayanam namaskrutya...*

ACTOR... *maskrutya...*

SUTRADHARA *Sharadam Suvisharadam...*

ACTOR... *radam...*

SUTRADHARA *Srirangamapi kartaram...*

ACTOR *(Opens his eyes, drops his hands and looks at Sutradhara)* Um...?

SUTRADHARA *(Going on, determined not to let his concentration be affected) Nava natyam prayujamahe.*

ACTOR... *jamhae.*

They stand facing each other

SUTRADHARA Nataraya, why did you break off?

ACTOR You said it was a prayer. But you went off in a different direction.

SUTRADHARA Different direction? How?

ACTOR First you said, 'Narayanam namaskrutya'. That was okay, he's a god. Then you said, namaskara to Sharada; that's all right too–she is Vagdevi, the Goddess of Speech. Then you said, 'Sriranga'...

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* Doesn't that also sound like a God's name?

ACTOR *(Shaking his head)* But 'Kartaram' is the creator of the play; how can he be God?

SUTRADHARA Do you mean to say God can't write plays?

ACTOR No, no, I don't mean that! But there's a world of difference between immortal God and a mortal dramatist, isn't there?

SUTRADHARA *(Getting an idea)* Aha! Our prayers have been answered. Inspiration strikes. Let's have a play on this very subject!

ACTOR *(Taken aback)* This subject? Which one?

SUTRADHARA That Gods or saintly men are not great and mortals are not small.

ACTOR *(Closing his ears)* Sacrilege! I refuse to listen!

SUTRADHARA *(Laughing)* If you close your ears, everything is sacrilege! Open your ears and listen to me. And listen carefully. It's better to grow and be called an immortal after death, than be called immortal and rot.

ACTOR *(Scared)* What are you saying?

SUTRADHARA *(Laughs)* Don't be scared. I just told you the subject. But the story is more important than the subject in a play. I'll tell you the story. Listen.

ACTOR A story? Is it the story of the play we are going to perform?

SUTRADHARA That's right. Listen–Gods and Goddesses are supposed to be immortal, aren't they?

ACTOR Of course! There is no death for them.

SUTRADHARA Demons are mortal, aren't they?

ACTOR Of course! Demons have been killed since the world began.

SUTRADHARA Then why did the Gods want to know how to bring a dead person back to life–the art of Sanjivani?

ACTOR *(Taken aback)* What!

SUTRADHARA Why did they want medicine for a disease which they did not have?

ACTOR *(In sudden understanding)* Oh! You're going to tell me the story of how the Gods sent Kacha, the son of Brihaspati, to Shukracharya to learn the art of Sanjivani. Ha, ha!

SUTRADHARA Don't laugh, Nataraya, don't laugh! Do you know why the immortal Gods needed Sanjivani? Do you?

ACTOR No. Why?

SUTRADHARA They preferred to come to earth and live, die and live again, rather than be immortal and go on in the same old way.

ACTOR *(As if his legs are failing him)* What did you say?

SUTRADHARA Listen to what they told Kacha when they sent him to Shukracharaya. They said: It's not enough to serve the Guru; you will have to please his beloved daughter Devayani. You will get knowledge only when Devayani is pleased.

ACTOR *(Surprised)* What? Kacha gets knowledge only when Devayani is pleased? How can that be? *(Sutradhara laughs)* Why do you laugh? I asked you a question.

SUTRADHARA *(Controlling his laughter)* I heard you. But our spectators have not come here to watch a *vidyadaana* ceremony, with me as the Guru and you as the pupil. Come, let's stage the play as an answer to your question.

While he speaks, the stage becomes completely dark

SUTRADHARA'S VOICE You asked me what's the connection between Devayani being pleased and Kacha acquiring knowledge. The Asuras did not want Kacha to learn this art, they killed him twice. Shukracharya brought him back to life each time on Devayani's insistence. Then Vrishaparva, the king of the Asuras, won over two of Shukracharya's disciples and made a third, a final attempt so that Kacha could never be revived by Sanjivani. Look what happened then. There! The disciples are coming to Shukracharya. Hide yourself; watch and listen from there. Shh!

While he is speaking, the stage becomes fully lighted. Sutradhara and the Actor are invisible. The scene is Shukracharya's ashram. The stage

gives the impression of a large expanse of land with plenty of trees. There is nobody on the stage. Sounds of loud laughter at a distance. Two of Shukracharya's disciples can be seen. As they enter, one of them controls his laughter and clamps his hand on the other's mouth to silence him.

1st DISCIPLE Shh! That's enough of laughing! Be quiet. As soon as I start crying, you have to cry too.

2nd DISCIPLE *(Unable to control his laughter)* Wait a minute. I still can't forget your words. Kacha is a Pacha! *(The 1st disciple again stops his mouth. As soon as he takes away his hand)* Kacha means... *(The 1st disciple again puts his hand over his mouth. As soon as he removes it he speaks again)* Kacha means... *(Stops his mouth as before)*

1st DISCIPLE *(Irritated)* Shut your mouth! Don't forget what King Vrishaparva has told us. This time, if Kacha is revived...

2nd DISCIPLE *(Interrupts)*.... we are finished! (*Wiping his eyes, gets suddenly serious)* Look here, we've already chopped him into tiny bits. Do you think he can be still alive?

1st DISCIPLE What a fool you are! Haven't you seen the power of our Guru's Sanjivani? The first time we cut him into pieces and gave him to the wolves. But he tore open those wolves and came out alive. The second time we threw the pieces into the sea so that they would be dissolved in it. But he re-formed himself and came out.

2nd DISCIPLE *(unable to control his enthusiasm)* But this time? We've ground him to powder and mixed him in our Guru's drink. And he drank it up, didn't he? Truly Kacha is a pacha!

1st DISCIPLE That is why I say, don't mess things up by laughing. This time there is no rebirth for him!

2nd DISCIPLE *(Scared)* But what if he tears himself out of our Guru as he did with the wolf?

1st DISCIPLE Don't be stupid! Do you think Devayani will let her father be destroyed?

2nd DISCIPLE *(Sudden understanding)* That's right! It's a wonderful idea. Either Kacha dies or our Guru does! And Devayani wants both Kacha and her father.

1st DISCIPLE Enough of your smartness! Go and tell Devayani about Kacha, instead of standing there talking to yourself!

2nd DISCIPLE *(Irritably)* What else can I do? When you haven't begun crying, how can I start?

1st DISCIPLE *(Also irritated)* How can I when you're still laughing? Suppose you burst out laughing when you see me cry?

2nd DISCIPLE *(With pride)* Just begin your sobbing and you'll see how, when I cry, trees will shed their leaves, creepers will shed flowers, the birds will...

1st DISCIPLE *(Interrupts)* Stop! Stop! All this bombast is because you can't cry.

2nd DISCIPLE *(Protesting)* You think I can't weep?

1st DISCIPLE *(Taunting him)* Tomorrow, when Vrishaparva says he wants your head, you'll weep all right. But we don't want that kind of crying.

2nd DISCIPLE What kind of weeping do you want?

1st DISCIPLE When you cry out of real sorrow, the sorrow disappears and the weeping stops. But this is different. The thing is, we're happy, but we want others to be unhappy. So you have to keep crying. To see another's grief makes you happier and you weep more.

2nd DISCIPLE Hmm! *(Takes a deep breath and looks at him)*

1st DISCIPLE Why do you look at me like that?

2nd DISCIPLE You seem to be better at describing weeping than at crying

1st DISCIPLE *(Protesting)* Is that so? Then, listen to me... *(Suddenly in a sorrowful tone)* Aiyyo! Aiyyo Kacha! Aiyyo...

2nd DISCIPLE *(Accepting the challenge)* Aiyyo Kacha! Amma Devayani! Kacha!

1st DISCIPLE Amma! Kacha--Devayani--Amma!

2nd DISCIPLE Amma! Kacha, Kacha!

DEVAYANI *(Entering suddenly)* Who's there? What is it?

1st DISCIPLE *(Crying)* Kacha...

DEVAYANI *(Frightened)* What is it? What's happened to Kacha?

1st DISCIPLE *(Controlling his tears)* He's not to be seen, Amma!

DEVAYANI Not to be seen?

2nd DISCIPLE We looked for him everywhere. But nowhere...

DEVAYANI Kacha is not to be seen?

1st DISCIPLE I went into the water to look for him...

2nd DISCIPLE I went up the trees to look for him...

1st DISCIPLE I went down the valleys to look for him...

2nd DISCIPLE I went up the hills looking for him...

1st DISCIPLE I searched for him in groves of trees...

2nd DISCIPLE I went into the animal caves to look for him...

DEVAYANI *(As if scared to say the words)* And Kacha is nowhere to be seen?

BOTH TOGETHER Nowhere, Amma!

DEVAYANI *(Screaming)* Appa! Appa! Appa!

SHUKRACHARYA *(Comes running)* What is it? What is it, my child?

DEVAYANI Appa, Kacha... *(Unable to say another word, clings to him and sobs)*

SHUKRACHAYUA *(Comforting her)* Be quiet my child! Kacha is safe.

1st DISCIPLE No, Guruji

SHUKRACHARYA *(As if seeing him for the first time)* Who is that?

2nd DISCIPLE We shouted, we went through the whole forest...

1st DISCIPLE We couldn't see Kacha...

2[nd] DISCIPLE There's no trace of him...

DEVAYANI *(Her face still muffled)* Aiyyo! What's happened to my Kacha? Somebody has done something. Aiyyo!

SHUKRA Devayani, the Asuras are under my power but they're the ones who are my enemies. What can I do?

DEVAYANI *(Moves away and tries to control her grief)* Appa, if anything has happened to Kacha, I won't live. If he is alive, I will wait for him, I won't eat or sleep until he comes.

SHUKRA *(Looks sternly at the disciples. They go out with bowed heads)* Devayani, why this unnecessary torture? Why do you torture yourself for a Brahmin's son?

DEVAYANI He's not just a Brahmin's son! He's the grandson of the ancient great Rishi Angirasa; he is Brihaspati's son, Brihaspati who has mastered penance and meditation. And Kacha himself--always enthusiastic, so able in his work, practising meditation, a Brahmachari--such a man is not just...

SHUKRA *(Surprised, stares at his daughter)* Yes, my daughter, I agree--but tell me what can I do? The Asuras kill him every time I bring him back to life.

DEVAYANI Appa, I don't want it to be said that you, who can bring the dead back to life, let your daughter die. That's why...

SHUKRA *(Even more surprised)* Devayani!

DEVAYANI *(Unable to face him)* Appa, without Kacha, Devayani can't live.

SHUKRA And Devayani's life is this Shukracharya's life. *(Comes closer and pats her gently)* Calm yourself, Devayani, be calm. I will find him and bring him back from wherever he is. Whatever his condition, I will bring him back to life. Just wait a little. *(He stands as if in meditation. Devayani looks at him with fear and curiosity)*

SHUKRA *(Still standing)* Come out, Kacha. *(Raises both his hands and repeats a little louder)* Come out, Kacha. *(Even louder)* Come

out, Kacha. *(With this last cry, his body starts trembling. Devayani, who has been looking about expectantly for Kacha, is frightened when she sees her father trembling)*

KACHA'S VOICE *(Kacha's voice is heard, but Shukracharya's lips move as if he is speaking)* Revered one, bless me. I, Kacha, salute thee! Consider me as you would a worthy son!

DEVAYANI *(Frightened, because she can't see Kacha)* Appa...

SHUKRA Did you hear that, Devayani?

DEVAYANI *(Still frightened)* But where is Kacha?

SHUKRA Wherever he is, he is safe.

DEVAYANI If he is safe, why can't we see him?

SHUKRA Why don't you ask him?

KACHA'S VOICE *(Shukracharya's lips move as before)* Will not a Brahmin killer burn?

DEVAYANI *(Not understanding)* Brahmin killing? Fear of being burnt? What is... I mean, why is it killing a Brahmin if Kacha comes out?

SHUKRA In that case, shall I call him?

KACHA'S VOICE Gurudev, calm yourself. I am ready to stay where I am by your grace. But I cannot come out tearing your stomach. I will not be the cause of a Brahmin's death.

DEVAYANI *(Not understanding)* Tearing your stomach?

SHUKRA Yes, Devayani, Kacha is in my stomach. Somebody must have cut him into bits and mixed him with my drink. But don't be frightened, Devayani. Since you are my life, I have no fears for my life. Tell me, shall I die so that you can see Kacha? Or else...

DEVAYANI Father, stop, stop. I cannot live without you. But... But... I have no desire to live without Kacha.

SHUKRA *(With pride)* Kacha, did you hear that? You are fortunate! Devayani, the daughter of Shukracharya, the one

Brahmin who can create new life in this living world, this Devayani loves you. Yes, you are fortunate. Come, since Devayani wishes it, I will give you knowledge of the Sanijivani.

DEVAYANI *(Delighted)* Sanjivani-vidya for Kacha!

SHUKRA Kacha, I give you the knowledge of Sanjivani. Come out of my stomach, tear it...

DEVAYANI & KACHA if you really love me, bring my father back to life when you come out.

SHUKRA *(As before)* Come out, Kacha... *(While he repeats it three times, stage becomes gradually dark)*

KACHA *(Even while the stage is dark)* So be it! *(Lights come on the stage. Shukracharya is standing with his hands raised. Kacha is bending in obeisance)* Kacha, who has received knowledge, prays for his Guru's blessings.

SHUKRA Having obtained Sanjivani, be like a light to this world. *(Blesses him and exits) (For a moment, Kacha and Devayani, not having expected Shukracharya's exit, are at a loss. They stare at each other, and, as if knowing they should not be so staring, remain silent.)*

KACHA *(Unable to look at her directly)* Devayani, Gurudev has blessed me. Now... now... allow me to take my leave...

DEVAYANI *(Looking down)* Why do you speak of taking leave? It's not yet time for you to leave this Gurukul.

KACHA *(Smiling)* What are you saying Devayani? Haven't I got Sanjivani-vidya?

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly raising her head and looking at him)* What do you mean? Did Kacha come here only to learn about Sanjivani? *(Kacha is silent)* A Brahmin youth came from the land of the gods to get the secret from the Asura's Guru? Hmm! May be that is why your Guru spoke that way!

KACHA *(Suspicious, not understanding her)* What? What did he say?

DEVAYANI I am giving you Sanjivani only to satisfy Devayani-that's what he said, didn't he? Now I understand the meaning of his words.

KACHA *(Still unable to understand, a little scared now)* The meaning of his words? What's so significant about them? Yes, what's there in them? They were meant to comfort a frightened daughter.

DEVAYANI *(Adamant)* They are not comforting words for a daughter, but a warning to a pupil against behaving wrongly.

KACHA What do you mean?

DEVAYANI 'I give you this knowledge to please Devayani. But beware! Devayani must be satisfied.' That's what they mean.

KACHA Oh! Is that so? Whatever it may be, now that I'm alive, you are satisfied, aren't you? Now, allow me to go. *(Devayani stands with her face downcast)* Why, Devayani, aren't you satisified?

DEVAYANI If Kacha, come back to life, is going back to the gods, I'm certainly not satisifed.

KACHA *(Laughing)* What? Would you have been satisfied if I had remained in your father's stomach? *(Devayani shakes her head)* What is it Devayani? Aren't you happy that I'm alive?

DEVAYANI You were living even before you came here. There was no question then of my being satisfied or not. You were alive in my father's stomach. That did not give me any satisfaction. Just the fact that you're living does not satisfy me, no, it doesn't!

KACHA Then tell me what. I will give it as my Gurudakshina before going away.

DEVAYANI If you go away, no dakshina will satisfy me.

KACHA I have to go. I came here with a purpose, that purpose has been achieved...

DEVAYANI *(Surprised)* What was your purpose?

KACHA To get the knowledge of Sanjivani.

DEVAYANI You haven't got it.

KACHA *(Interrupts)* Gurudev himself said that I have obtained it.

DEVAYANI Getting knowledge does not mean that you have the knowledge.

KACHA *(Not understanding)* What did you say?

DEVAYANI Until you get enough skill, what you learn is like an image in a mirror.

KACHA How much more skill do I need? Didn't I bring my Guru back to life the moment I acquired learning?

DEVAYANI *(Stares at him)* That was because of me. You could do it because I wanted to have my father back, not because you had the skill.

KACHA *(Laughs condescendingly)* Say what you want! Please yourself!

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly provoked)* Why should I be satisfied? Should I be satisfied because the man for whom I was ready to sacrifice even my father–this man, the moment he comes back to life, treats me as if I'm in his way and kicks me aside and says he wants to go away? Every day Devayani used to wait at the door, her eyes longing to see Kacha, thinking--it's evening, the sun has set, the cattle are coming home, why hasn't Kacha come? Now that same Kacha is going home without even a look at Devayani. Should she be satisfied? Life without Kacha near her was unbearable for Devayani. Now Kacha wants to go far from her. Should Devayani be satisfied? Why–for what reason–should I be satisfied? *(Unable to control her grief, she turns her face aside)*

KACHA *(Suddenly understanding, in surprise)* Devayani.... *(As he comes near...)*

DEVAYANI *(To herself)* The hand which I thought would accept me is now pushing me away. *(Hearing these words, Kacha abruptly steps back)*

KACHA *(Unaffected by her words)* Devayani, if Gurudev hears your words...

DEVAYANI *(Quickly turns and interrupts)* He heard them, he agreed to them. That is why he saved your life without thinking of the danger to his.

KACHA *(Shaking his head)* No! It's impossible! It's wrong! It's a sin!

DEVAYANI *(Taking a step forward)* What did you say?

KACHA *(Stubbornly)* I said it's wrong, I said it's a sin!

DEVAYANI *(Laughing in contempt)* A man who talks this way claims he has Sanjivani! Ha, ha!

KACHA *(Irritated)* That's enough of your ridicule! *(With equal contempt)* A woman--doesn't matter whose daughter she is--can't help having a woman's mind.

DEVAYANI A woman's mind!

KACHA What else? What's the connection between my getting the Sanjivani and calling your thoughts a sin?

DEVAYANI *(Taunting, and with pity)* Men! A woman's mind, he says! If you don't understand the connection, I'll tell you. Sanjivani itself is woman.

KACHA (*Laughs heartily)* Ha, ha, ha!

DEVAYANI *(Unable to control herself)* Yes, laugh! When you understand, you can go on laughing forever. It's because you couldn't understand that you came here to learn, didn't you? You come from the gods, you'll never die; how can you imagine the power of giving birth? Giving a stray seed a place in the womb, infusing the inanimate thing with the energy to grow and when it ripens and falls, creating fresh life even out of that--so it goes on eternally. What can you know of a woman's mind which makes a destructible seed immortal? You called Sanjivini a woman's mind, didn't you? You spoke the truth without realizing it. May be your Guru will congratulate you for it.

KACHA *(Frightened by her ideas)* Devayani, Devayani, I understand. But aren't you talking without understanding? A seed sprouts out of the earth's womb, a tree grows from the shoot, the trees bear fruit and the seeds of that fallen fruit sprout once

again. This is a fact of the inanimate world. But living creatures...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* What's the difference? The law of growth is the same, the power of creation is the same- Sanjivani is the only power.

KACHA *(Shaking his head)* Never! If the purpose of birth was only to create...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupts)* It is. There's no 'If' about it. And that is why the gods want Sanjivani.

KACHA *(With a smile)* The gods don't lack for anything.

DEVAYANI *(Taunting him)* Then why did they send you here to get the knowledge of Sanjivani? *(Thoughtfully)* Maybe, in a way, you're right. It's because the gods lack for nothing that they don't have the strength to defeat the Asuras.

KACHA *(Proudly)* The Gods are immortal...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* Which is why they are becoming weaker.

KACHA Chhe! These are meaningless words. The world of the gods always has strength.

DEVAYANI True! That's why I said only that strength. The same strength. But Sanjivani saves the past strength of all creatures, gives fresh strength to live and grow. The gods don't have Sanjivani. And that's why you are here. I love you and want you to have the knowledge; that's why I am telling you- accept me and Sanjivani will be achievable for you.

KACHA *(As if polluted)* Devayanji! Such inauspicious words! Such unspeakable thought! But I have obtained Sanjivani. I will not be fooled by your words.

DEVAYANI Obtaining Sanjivani is one thing, Sanjivani being fruitful is another. I am prepared to give up everything for you. Don't reject me.

KACHA Devayani! Devayani! You are my Guru's daughter. A Guru is like a father. Which makes us brother and sister. Will you stop saying such unspeakable words?

SANJIVANI *(Stepping forward and pleading)* Kacha, don't use words that fill me with disgust for myself. If you call my words unspeakable, you may have to call God's creation unspeakable too. I am a woman. I am Sanjivani--I can create many from one. I am Sanjivani--I can make even the old grow. I am Sanjivani--I can fill the inanimate with vitality. Only in accepting me will your Sanjivani be fulfilled. Kacha had to die to get Shukracharya's Sanjivani. Shukracharya also had to die. But many Kachas will get Kacha's Sanjivani without anyone dying if Kacha accepts me--I who am a woman.

KACHA *(As if finding a solution)* You said Kacha has to die. You saw him dead, didn't you? Wasn't the dead Kacha given the gift of life? You refuse to accept a sibling relationship with me, even though you are my Guru's daughter; well, let it go. But Devayani, you gave me the gift of life- you have a mother's power. For God's sake, give up your obscene thoughts.

DEVAYANI *(Covering her ears)* Sibling relationship! A mother's power! Aiyyo! Why do you use such irrelevant words?

KACHA *(Surprised)* Irrelevant?

DEVAYANI What else can I say? The Rishis say a husband is reborn in his wife--they call her 'Jyaya', not 'Mother'. Think of that.

KACHA *(Sighing)* Hmm! Such is the Asuras' morality!

DEVAYANI Yes, this is how it is! The Asura's morality has women marrying for love; it's not like the God's morality- women dancing to seduce men.

KACHA *(As a last resort)* You spoke rightly. I belong to the world of Gods. I do not know the ethics of love. And that's why I tell you for the last time--allow me to go peacefully.

DEVAYANI *(Surprised)* No love?

KACHA No!

DEVAYANI Devayani loves Kacha...

KACHA *(Interrupting)* But Kacha does not love Devayani. Never.

DEVAYANI *(As if to herself)* Kacha does not love?

KACHA *(Adamant)* No! No! A hundred times no!

DEVAYANI *(Again to herself)* Sanjivani has love...

KACHA *(Interrupting)* What did you say?

DEVAYANI *(As before, continuing)* But the man who has it has no love...

KACHA *(Scared)* What? What is this?

DEVAYANI *(As before)* Then how will you be able to achieve success with Sanjivani?

KACHA *(Even more scared)* Sanjivani will not work for me?

DEVAYANI *(Again as before)* The man who spurns the Sanjivani which desired him, a desire which was part of Nature's Dharma and Nature's passion- for such a man Sanjivani is perilous, it is a curse. Its attainment is futile, futile.

KACHA *(Confused by his fear)* Is the Brahmacharya I practised in this Gurukul fruitless? I who have lived for other's welfare selflessly–is this my curse? Aiyyo! Aiyyo! *(While he speaks, the stage becomes dark)*

VOICE OF DEVAYANI *(Comes out of the dark)*

Since you have refused my request for marriage,
Oh Kacha, you will not be able to use this knowledge.*

When the Sloka is complete, light comes on the stage. The curtain comes down. The Sutradhara and the actor are standing in front of the curtain as before

ACTOR *(Looking back at the curtain)* Devayani's image still lingers before my eyes.

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* In that lies the secret of the play.

ACTOR *(Not understanding)* What do you mean?

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* *(Adiparva 77. 16)*

SUTRADHARA A woman's image always captivates a man. When she sees this, the woman thinks the man is enamoured of her. She doesn't realise that the man has not surrendered his mind, that his pleasure is only in seeing her. And then...

ACTOR *(Interrupting)* Fiery curses fly from her mouth, don't they? Ha, ha! Anyway it was a lovely play!

SUTRADHARA *(Surprised)* It was? Do you think the play is over?

ACTOR Of course, it's over! Devayani's story is over, the play is also over.

SUTRADHARA The story is not over, the play is not done.

ACTOR *(Taken aback)* Not over? What do you mean?

SUTRADHARA What I mean, Nataraya, is that when a woman and a man curse each other, the drama of life hasn't even begun--forget about it ending. And you say it is over.

ACTOR *(Surprised)* What do you mean not ended? Hasn't Kacha gone away?

SUTRADHARA But Sanjivani is still there.

ACTOR What does that mean? Kacha got the knowledge, didn't he?

SUTRADHARA Yes, but it can't be used.

ACTOR *(Suddenly realizing, laughs)* Oho! You're saying he didn't get married. Look at Devayani's courage, Lord Sutradhara! In spite of being a woman, she said, 'Marry me'.

SUTRADHARA Why shouldn't she?

ACTOR Why shouldn't she! After all, a woman...

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* That's why she asked him.

ACTOR *(Finding the idea distasteful)* What did you say?

SUTRADHARA Nataraya, don't get excited, listen. The world has progressed because women take control. It's a rule of the world that elders should take the initiative in speaking.

ACTOR So, does this lopsided philosophy of yours say that Kacha was wrong in not loving an elder?

SUTRADHARA The fault is not Kacha's, it's Devayani's.

ACTOR Honestly, this is topsy turvy logic...

SUTRADHARA *(Laughing, interrupts)* There's no topsy and no turvy. Listen to me. When you sow a seed in a place, the tree grows right there. There's no room for another seed in the same place and at the same time. But the sun that nourishes the seed doesn't help that seed alone; it offers nourishment to many other seeds. A woman's love is like the soil; a man's love is like the sun. Devayani's fault was that she didn't understand this. *(Actor looks at him with sarcastic smile)* Why do you smile, Nataraya?

ACTOR I was wondering whether you'd forgotten something you'd said earlier.

SUTRADHARA What was that?

ACTOR You said that the story is more important than the subject.

SUTRADHARA *(Smiling)* What's the connection?

ACTOR I mean, what I'd understood of the story until now has become difficult to understand because of your analysis of the subject.

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupts, smiling)* Oho! So Nataraya is hinting that the story should move.

ACTOR Yes, you said the story is not over. If it isn't over, let it proceed, because the spectators who have come to see the play...

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)*... Should not be disappointed. Isn't that what you mean? I understand; I've got your meaning. Now tell me, which story...

ACTOR *(Surprised)* What do you mean, Sutradhara? After telling us Devayani's story until now, you say which story...

SUTRADHARA *(Interrupting)* Okay, okay. I was just testing you to see whether you were listening to the story. I too am eager to go on with Devayani's story...

ACTOR *(Eagerly)* What did Devayani do after Kacha rejected her?

SUTRADHARA *(Surprised)* What a stupid question! What did Devayani do? What could she do? She sat waiting for Kacha.

ACTOR *(Eagerly)* And did he come back?

SUTRADHARA He did--but not this Kacha; it was another one.

ACTOR *(Not understanding)* Another Kacha? How many Kachas were there?

SUTRADHARA Ask me how many there are, not how many there were. The truth is, there are as many Kachas as there are men in this world.

ACTOR What?

SUTRADHARA Yes. And there are as many Devayanis as there are women in this world. Don't stare at me like that. *(The stage becomes dark. Sutradhara's voice can be heard in this darkness)* Can you see? That's a pool in King Vrishaparva's capital. Look at the number of women. You know Devayani, of course. That other beautiful young woman is Sharmishtha, Vrishaparva's daughter. The rest are the Princess's *dasis*. They have come to the pool to bathe. They've undressed and are putting away their clothes there- that's enough, no need to see any more. They are getting into the water. They've got in, yes, you can't see them now. You can open your eyes. Oh, look! Their clothes are being blown away by the wind. *(If possible, a blowing wind should be suggested on the stage)* Oh, they seem to have finished bathing. But what is this? *(The lights come on. The curtain goes up. Sutradhara and Actor are not to be seen. Sharmishtha and Devayani enter as described by Sutradhara)* These are Devayani and Sharmishtha. They seem to be angry, they are quarrelling! It's better we are not seen.

Sharmishtha and Devayani enter, their faces expressing anger, and stand in the centre facing each other

SHARMISHTHA Devayani, Devayani, do you think you can become a princess by wearing a princess's clothes?

DEVAYANI Sharmishtha, be careful about what you say! You know who I am!

SHARMISHTHA *(Taunting)* Oh! 'Who I am'! Is she world–famous! Isn't she the brave Brahmin woman who harassess her father's disciples, pestering them to marry her, so that they run away!

DEVAYANI Sharmishtha, you know that in this kingdom my father...

SHARMISHTHA Don't bask in the glory of your father's name. Didn't the Brahmin boy Kacha spurn you when you begged him to marry you? Did your father's fame save you from that disgrace? How arrogant of that poor Brahmin boy! Let go! Get out of my clothes!

DEVAYANI *(Looks at herself in surprise)* Your clothes?

SHARMISHTHA *(Flaring up)* Whose clothes do you think you are wearing?

DEVYANI *(Even more surprised)* Are these yours? Do you think the wind got our clothes in a tangle?

SHARMISHTHA *(Taunting)* Aha! Don't give me that lame excuse. Tangled by the wind! She's wearing my clothes intentionally...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* Why would I wear a *dasi's* clothes?

SHARMISHTHA *(Angrily)* What? What did you say, you...? Do you think that if you wear my clothes, you'll get my beauty and finally find a husband? Is it the arrogance of that dream that makes you insult me? *(Holds her with force)* I, the daughter of King Vrishaparva--am I a *dasi*?

DEVAYANI *(Irritated)* Get away from me, Sharmishtha! Daughter of King Vrishaparva, indeed! Her father a king! Your father is my father's disciple and so you are my discple! As a disciple, aren't you ashamed to wear my clothes?

SHARMISHTHA *(Interrupting)* Are these clothes yours?

DEVAYANI *(Can't control her anger)* You're a daughter of the Asuras--how will you know proper behaviour?

SHARMISHTHA *(With a laugh of contempt)* Disciple? My father your father's disciple! Your father can sit only after my father sits down...

DEVAYANI But your father sits with folded hands, doesn't he?

SHARMISHTHA But when my father stands up, your father has to stand up...

DEVAYANI But your father stands with a bowed head!

SHARMISHTHA When my father laughs, your father has to praise.

DEVAYANI My father's blessings make your father smile.

SHARMISHTHA If my father is angry, your father has to grin and beg his pardon...

DEVAYANI *(Can't control her anger)* What did you say, you wretch?

SHARMISHTHA You're a beggar's daughter.

DEVAYANI *(Angrily)* Take care! Take care, you demoness!

SHARMISHTHA You're a sycophant's daughter.

DEVAYANI *(Angrily)* I'll slit your tongue, you slut... *(She goes to attack her...)*

SHARMISHTHA *(Pushing Devayani away with force, but slowly, since Devayani is strong)* My father is the Lord of this kingdom, a hero to admirers, he is the fountain of bounty to beggars...

DEVAYANI You cheat, you low creature, you wanton woman...

SHARMISHTHA *(Moving back)* If you say any more, my *dasis* will drag you away and throw you out of the town like a stray dog. You want to abuse me? You want to curse me? Come, I'll throw you in the pool; you can cool yourself and abuse me to your heart's content.

They exit gradually. Suddenly sound of something falling into the water and Devayani's screams can be heard, 'Aiyyo! I am dying'! Sharmishtha comes out furious, looking back

SHARMISHTHA Die! Die! You sinful creature, die! I'll be waiting in the palace, all dressed up, to hear of your death.

Devayani's cries of 'I'm dying, save me' go on as Sharmishtha exits. Yayati enters

YAYATI *(Looking around)* What is this? I hear the voice of someone in distress.

DEVAYANI's VOICE Aiyyo! Save me!

YAYATI *(Surprised)* The voice of a woman in distress! *(Goes to the edge of the stage and looks down)* Who is it? Who wants to be saved and from what?

VOICE OF DEVAYANI Here. I fell in the pool.

YAYATI *(Takes a step forward, bends)* Don't be afraid, good woman. Here, I'll raise you up. *(Gives her his hand)*

DEVAYANI Wait! Who are you?

YAYATI I am King Yayati. I was out hunting, and feeling thirsty, I came here in search of water. I am a Kshatriya--my duty it is to protect those in distress. *(Brings her on stage)* How did you slip into the grassy-banked pool? And who are you?

Devayani enters, wet to her knees

DEVAYANI *(Remembers, with hatred)* Who am I? I am Devayani, the daughter of Shukracharya, the great poet, the man who, with his learning, brings back to life the demons killed by the gods.

YAYATI How did this accident happen? How did you fall into the pool?

DEVAYANI *(As above)* By the bad luck of the Asuras.

YAYATI Brahmin maiden, don't let your hatred spoil your beauty. *(Devayani suddenly stares at him)* I'll take you to your father, if it is your pleasure...

DEVAYANI *(Not understanding)* Pleasure...?

YAYATI *(Not looking at her)* If you trust me...

DEVAYANI *(Surprised)* Trust? *(As if thinking)* I trust you. You look as if you come from a good family, you seem to be brave--that's why I allowed you to hold my hand. But *(remembering)* I don't trust myself.

YAYATI Forgive me, your father is a great Brahmin, he is the Guru of the world. I have great regard for him, but I also fear him. If I leave you in this condition, the great Brahmin will be angry, he will curse...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* That's enough! I don't want to hear any more! *(Yayati stares at her in surprise)* Where was this fear of my father when you held me by the hand? It comes back to you now, does it?

YAYATI I didn't know your background then, good woman!

DEVAYANI *(Stamping her feet)* Good woman! Good woman! Didn't know my background! Which is why I seemed a desirable girl, did I? *(Seeing Yayati shaking his head, persists)* When I was an attractive girl, you thought it was your duty as a Kashatriya to hold me by my hand and pull me out. Now I am not a girl, I am not myself--I am the daughter of an awesome father.

YAYATI Oh Brahmin girl, think before you speak! It is a Kshatriya king's duty to help a person in distress...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* Well, you saved me. Now you can go...

YAYATI Only after I take you to safety--away from this dangerous place...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* Your presence is itself dangerous for me. Go away! *(Yayati is still waiting)* Go away! I've made up my mind I won't move from here. Just go! I won't go from here until sin has been punished and wrong doing revenged *(As if unable to look at the hate on her face, Yayati retreats step by step and reaches the edge of the stage)* The spirit of revenge

is filling Devayani's life. *(Forgetting Yayati's presence, stands with a blank face)* I am not Devayani, I am Shukracharya's daughter! I am the Guru's daughter! I am not Devayani, but the daughter of the great poet who is the Guru of the whole world! I am a Guru's daughter for the whole world. I am not a girl to be loved, I am worthy of worship. *(Gradually becomes emotional)* I am not a woman who creates fresh life out of her own; I am Sanjivani who breathes fresh life when life has ceased. I have nobody; yet everyone is mine. I can't bear this agony, I can't bear it.

Hides her face and as she sobs uncontrollably

YAYATI *(Softly so that she can't hear)* Better to cope with the original fire than to catch a flying spark. Let me do my duty and send a message to her father. *(Exits)*

Devayani remains standing for a while. A moment's silence. Shukracharya enters from the direction of Yayati's exit. 'Devayani, my child, what's happened to you? Are you all right?, Pauses in surprise when he sees her, then runs to her.

SHUKRA *(Holding her close, patting her)* Devayani, you are not hurt, are you? I was getting desperate waiting for you. The house without you is like a wilderness to your father. Come home, my child and light up my house again.

DEVAYANI *(Shakes her head without raising her face)*

SHUKRA *(Frightened)* What is this, Devayani? Won't you come to your father's house?

DEVAYANI *(Still emotional)* My home is wherever my father is. *(Unable to go on, hides her face)*

SHUKRA *(Makes her stand facing him and hold her by the chin and raises her face)* A father's home is where his daughter is. Devayani are you angry with me? *(She shakes her head)* Then why are you standing like a refugee outside the city?

DEVAYANI *(Controlling her sorrow, looks at her father)* I can no longer stay in King Vrishaparva's kingdom.

SHUKRA *(Surprised, moving back)* What are you saying? What happened, my child?

DEVAYANI I don't want to be even in the shadow of the city where I have been insulted so badly.

SHUKRA *(Even more surprised)* Insulted? You? Shukracharya's daughter? The daughter of the great Shukracharya whom the Suras and the Asuras worship as a Guru?

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* Do the Asuras worship you?

SHUKRA *(Can't help laughing)* What a question!

DEVAYANI *(Paying no attention to his words)* Does Vrishaparva, the lord of the Demons, also worship you?

SHUKRA Devayani, without me he has no kingdom. It is because of me that he is a king today; it is my strength...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* Father, you delude yourself...

SHUKRA *(His ego pricked)* What did you say?

DEVAYANI That Vrishaparva's daughter said so. She said it in the presence of a hundred *dasis*. She spoke with the wind, the sun, the earth and the sky as witnesses...

SHUKRA *(Eagerly)* Tell me, tell me what Sharmishta said.

DEVAYANI *(With a provocative calmness)* She said I'm a beggar's daughter, that my father is a sycophant...

SHUKRA *(Angry)* What did you say?

DEVAYANI *(Going on)* Her father is the benefactor of beggars, she said, he's a hero to flatterers like you. *(Suddenly emotional)* Father, I can't tolerate this insult, I cannot step into such a kingdom.

SHUKRA *(Suddenly calm)* Silly girl! Why do you give any importance to a stupid Asura girl's words? You shouldn't let a stupid person's words hurt you; it's not a sign of intelligence.

DEVAYANI To live in the company of ignorant persons is not a sign of intelligence, either.

SHUKRA *(Satisfied that his daughter's anger has cooled down)* I agree. Is that all?

DEVAYANI To avoid the company of ignorant people, I will not enter the city.

SHUKRA *(Again scared)* Devayani, why are you so stubborn? Don't you believe me? Come, I will see that you get satisfaction.

DEVAYANI Father, I have no satisfaction. I will not be satisfied until I crush those who have insulted me. I will not be satisfied until those who called me a beggar stand before me with folded hands and bowed head and I kick that bowed head.

SHUKRA *(Thinks deeply)* In that case, wait. *(Looks in)* Hey, boy! Go right away and tell King Vrishaparva to come here. Tell him it is his Guru's order. *(To Devayani)* Devayani, if you are not satisified, how can I be satisfied? If you don't want this city, I don't want it, either. You'll see yourself who's the beggar and who's the giver.

VRISHAPARVA *(Enters and bows with folded hands)* Vrishaparva, your humble disciple, salutes the Guru of the Asuras. *(Shukacharya gives Devayani a satisfied look)*

SHUKRA Oh King of the Asuras, your Guru is unhappy with your arrogance and wishes to leave the city.

VRISHAPARVA *(With devotion and fear)* Guru, tell me what arrogance have you seen in me? If I have done wrong. I will cut off my hands and offer them to you; if I have had wrong thoughts in my mind, I will cut off my head and place it at your feet.

SHUKRA Vrishaparva, don't commit sin by asking about things you already know. You ask me what arrogance? Wasn't it a sin to kill my best disciple Kacha by deception?

VRISHAPARVA *(Surprised)* Kacha's killing? How can that be, Guru? This slave of yours heard that Kacha finished his studies and went back home safe and sound. Isn't that true?

SHUKRA He was safe because I revived him through Sanjivani. But it's true that three times someone tried to kill him.

VRISHAPARVA If that is true, those who tried to kill him will surely be punished. Whereever they are–on Mount Meru's peak or at the bottom of the ocean–if you tell me who they are..

SHUKRA *(Interrupting)* Let all the Asuras go to Mount Meru or to the bottom of the sea. I have nothing to do with them. But I don't want your kingdom.

VRISHAPARVA What's so lacking in my kingdom that...

SHUKRA *(Interrupting)* If a kingdom has no room for my Devayani, I want no place in that kingdom, either.

DEVAYANI *(As Vrishaparva looks at her in surprise)* We don't want a kingdom in which we have been insulted.

SHUKRA If Devayani is happy, I can live in peace.

VRISHAPARVA Gurudev, how did you ever imagine that this kingdom is mine? Why should Devayani be unhappy staying in her own father's kingdom?

DEVAYANI What--what did you say, king of the Asuras?

VRISHAPARVA *(With a smile)* I am only an Asura, I'm not a king! Guru is the lord of all the Asura's wealth, of the treasures, the horses, the chariots, the elephants.

SHUKRA If I am indeed the Lord of all this, try to please Devayani, this Lord's daughter. Only then can I live here as the Lord.

DEVAYANI Do you say you are the lord of the royal treasure, father? Let me hear it from the King himself, then I'll agree.

VRISHAPARVA Devayani, daughter of my Guru, please tell me what you desire. I will fulfil it, however difficult it may be.

DEVAYANI Then listen! Sharmishtha should come to me with a thousand maidens and become my *dasi*.

VRISHAPARVA I agree!

DEVAYANI Whichever house my father marries me into, she should follow me to that house as my *dasi*!

VRISHAPARVA That follows, doesn't it?

DEVAYANI And lastly, your daughter should take on her duties as my *dasi* from this moment.

VRISHAPARVA *(To someone inside)* Go. Go and tell Sharmishtha that her father wants her here.

DEVAYANI When that is done I will enter the city.

SHUKRA I will then follow her with pleasure.

SHARMISHTHA *(Enters)* Father, I greet you! I come at your command.

VRISHAPARVA Sharmishtha my daughter, the Guru wants to leave our city and go away...

SHUKRA... And it is in your hands to keep me here.

SHARMISHTHA I know my father owes his kingdom to you, Gurudev, I know that your going away is not good for the Asuras. I am ready to do anything for the security of my father's kingdom and for the good of the Asuras.

VRISHAPARVA Sharmishtha, you have to become Devayani's *dasi*, along with a thousand others.

SHARMISHTHA *(Bowing with folded hands)* As my father wishes.

DEVAYANI When I get married and go to my husband's home, you will have to follow me there--as my *dasi*.

SHARMISHTHA *(Facing her)* It will be done.

DEVAYANI *(Surprised)* What did you say?

SHARMISHTHA *(As above, but with a smile)* I said it will be done.

DEVAYANI *(Acts surprise)* Did you say it will be done? I am a beggar's daughter and you're the patron's daughter. And you say you will be my maid. Has a hero's daughter agreed to become a sycophant's daughter's maid?

SHARMISHTHA *(As though to herself)* I have agreed with pleasure for the welfare of my family.

VRISHAPARVA *(Beaming with pride)* My daughter, you are sacrificing yourself for the benefit of others. For your compassion and affection, you will become the mother of an Emperor.

DEVAYANI Let my *dasi* make preparations for my entry into the city...

VRISHAPARVA This way, this way Gurudev.

As he says this, Devayani, Shukracharya and Vrishaparva go out. Sharmishtha continues to stand, unnoticed by anyone

SHARMISHTHA *(As if to herself)* I agree with pleasure for the welfare of my family. *(She raises her face and looks up. The stage becomes dark)*

VOICE OF SHARMISHTHA *(Out of the dark)*

In whatever way one can, one should give comfort to one's family which is in distress. Therefore, I will follow you, wherever your father gives you away in marriage.

SUTRADHARA'S VOICE Oh best of Kings! After a long time the beautiful Devayani went to the same forest to amuse herself; together with her thousand *dasis* and with Sharmishtha. She reached the same place and roamed about to her heart's content.

DEVAYANI'S VOICE Sharmishtha, Sharmishtha, look--the same pool. The same pool into which you pushed me and insulted me. Dasi Sharmishtha, I will stay by the pool. I am tired after our games. Get some fruits, serve me water. Come, Dasi...

As Devayani insists, 'Come here, come and serve me', the stage becomes bright

DEVAYANI *(She is sitting centre stage, on a platform below a tree. Sees Sharmishtha at a distance and calls out to her)* Sharmishtha...

SHARMISHTHA *(Not rising)* Devayani...

DEVAYANI You are my *dasi*...

SHARMISHTHA Yes, Devayani.

DEVAYANI When I sit, you must stand.

SHARMISHTHA *(Getting up)* As you say, Devayani.

DEVAYANI You are not to get up until I tell you to.

SHARMISHTHA *(Sitting down)* I am sorry, Devayani.

DEVAYANI When you talk to me, you must stand with folded hands.

SHARMISHTHA *(Standing that way)* As you order, Devayani.

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly irritated)* Order, order! Don't you have any pride? I want to insult you every moment- don't you have any pride? Sharmishtha, have you lost your spirit of retaliation? You behave like a puppet.

SHARMISHTHA *(With a smile)* I've become a *dasi* of my own pleasure, Devayani.

DEVAYANI *(Irritated)* Then you will suffer. *(Throws the fruits)* The fruits slipped out of my hands. Go, get them.

SHARMISHTHA *(Bringing the fruits to her)* I'll bring them even if you throw them intentionally. Why do you say they slipped from your hands?

DEVAYANI *(Irritated)* Are you saying I lied?

SHARMISHTHA No. Just as I have become your *dasi* with pleasure, why don't you become my mistress with pleasure?

DEVAYANI *(Surprised)* Am I not your mistress now?

SHARMISHTHA I said it because you behave as if you have become my mistress out of some compulsion, because of someone's pressure.

DEVAYANI *(Taunting)* Is that so? Here! I am throwing these of my own pleasure. Go, get them.

Throws the fruits around

SHARMISHTHA There's no greater happiness for me than to serve and give pleasure to someone *(As she is gathering the fruits...)*

DEVAYANI Sharmishtha!

SHARMISHTHA *(Surprised at the authoritative voice, she stops for a moment)* What is it?

DEVAYANI Sharmishtha! You should not walk like that!

SHARMISHTHA *(As she bends over to pick the fruit)* I shouldn't?

DEVAYANI You should not bend your body like that!

SHARMISHTHA *(Can't understand)* My body...?

DEVAYANI *(In a stubborn tone)* You are my *dasi*, Sharmishtha! *(Raising her voice)* You are my *dasi*!

SHARMISHTHA *(In surprise)* Haven't I said so myself?

DEVAYANI *(Not heeding her)* You are my *dasi*, so you should walk like I walk.

SHARMISHTHA As you walk!

DEVAYANI *(Getting up)* Like this... *(In her anger she takes hurried steps--realising it, stops)* no, like this... *(Takes slow steps. Then realizing something else, she stops)* no, like this- *(walks with hands on her waist)* Do you understand?

SHARMISHTHA Can I bend when I am picking up the fruits?

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly)* No, no, wait! I understand! Sharmishtha, I have come to know your cunningness; you want to display the grace of your walk, the charm of your curves, the elegance of your steps. Yes, I know your cunning.

SHARMISHTHA Devayani, why do you want to hurt me with such words and yourself with such thoughts?

DEVAYANI *(As if in despair)* What else can I do? In some evil moment I made you my *dasi*. Now I seem to have become your *dasi*. My future is in your hands...

SHARMISHTHA If you find my company so unbearable, I will stay at a distance. *(Starts to go away)*

DEVAYANI *(Screams as if with fear)* No, no! *(Seeing that Sharmishtha is staring at her)* When you go far from me you are not just

unbearable, you frighten me. *(Partly to herself)* Having you with me is like an ugly woman wearing beautiful clothes. It's the beauty of the clothes that everyone will look at. Who will look at an ugly woman?

SHARMISHTHA *(With genuine pity)* If the fault is mine, tell me Devayani. I'll try to correct it.

DEVAYANI *(With a piercing look)* The fault is not yours; even if it is, you can't correct it.

SHARMISHTHA I swear by my father...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* Don't! The fault is not yours. When you walk, your body sways like a creeper in the wind- you don't do it intentionally! You're not aware of the fact that men tremble at the sight of your bow--like curved body. The fault is not yours, Sharmishtha! There's some power in you that attracts all the beauty of the world and, after absorbing it, makes it even more fascinating. The fault is mine, Sharmishtha, the fault is mine. As Shukracharya's daughter I grew up under his glory alone and became just Sanjivani. The fault is mine. *(Sits down- she can't find any more words)*

SHARMISHTHA *(Staring at her, she approaches her with slow steps, sits down and with her hands in Deavayani's lap, lifts her head and stares at her)* Devayani, I am a simple girl. Some thought which I can't understand and which is beyond my experience is tormenting you. Tell me.

DEVAYANI *(Partly to herself)*. What is tormenting me? *(Suddenly realizes Sharmishtha's presence)* I said I was only Sanjivani, didn't I? No, no, that is not true. *(Gets emotional)* I was not just Sanjivani. I was also an innocent girl. There was something beyond my experience that was tormenting me. I thought that once I got that experience, the torment would cease. I was not Sanjivani then. The day I stood before Kacha, I was not even Devayani.

SHARMISHTHA *(Interrupting)* Devayani, Kacha belonged to the world of the gods. He was our enemy. Why do you torture

yourself with his memory? To you, the daughter of the Asura Guru, Kacha is an enemy...

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly aroused)* What did you say? Sharmishtha, did you say Kacha was my enemy? No, no! Then there was no Kacha; there was no Devayani either. There was only a man and a woman. Sharmishtha, Kacha is not Devayani's enemy. The moment the innocent girl experienced this, she became Sanjivani.

SHARMISHTHA *(Hurt)* Devayani, if I have hurt you by something I said, forgive me. I will do as you say. I will look as you look, I will walk as you walk...

DEVAYANI *(With a laugh)* You're silly! You're really innocent, aren't you? You will do as I say! What authority do I have to tell you anything? I've given up the pride in being a woman, my mind has been corrupted...

SHARMISHTHA *(Puts her hand on Devayani's mouth)* Don't say such terrible things.

DEVAYANI *(Calmy removes Sharmishtha's hand)* Yes, I am a person with a corrupt mind. You want to see things the way I do--do you think you can? Will you? Kacha's image has blurred my vision. Your vision is clear. You say you will walk the way I do! Silly Sharmishtha, the eternal beauty of creation is in your steps, the freshness of spring in your gait. My... *(Suddenly stops and stares at Sharmishtha)* What am I saying? You are only my *dasi*. What spell have you cast on me? You are a tender sprout without experience, I am a fruit, understand? I'm a fruit softened by the repeated blows of experience. *(Suddenly scared)* No, Sharmishtha, no! I am not a fruit! A fruit falls down, unable to bear its own weight. *(Full of apprehension)* Save me, save me from falling.

SHARMISHTHA *(Affectionately)* Devayani, talk to me; I am your younger sister, tell me what is troubling you. How can I help you? Tell me how I can comfort you.

DEVAYANI You comfort me? You, who remind me that I too was once an innocent girl–how can you help me? You've so

emphatically made me realise that I do not have that female shakti which creates beautiful life, that I am Sajnivani which sustains life--how can you give me comfort? Never! It is impossible. I know who you are.

SHARMISHTHA *(Interrupting)* Devayani, Devayani, don't be so harsh. Be calm. Think of me as your younger sister. I am also a woman. Akka, Akka!

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly pushes her away, angrily)* Akka! Akka! I, your Akka? And you my younger sister? You are my rival! *(Scared, she rises and faces Sharmishtha)* You are my rival! Understand? I am Sanjivani, a crude mechanism that brings the dead back to life. And you? You're my rival. You create ideas of beauty and happiness, you offer the heart's desire instead of the essential, beauty instead of truth and happiness instead of reality and lure away my Lord, the Lord of creation away from me. You are my rival, understand? *(Comes near, seeing her tears, relents.)* Don't, don't cry; true, you are my sister. I am mourning my own misfortune, this has nothing to do with you. No, don't cry. You're my sister, my younger sister. *(She holds Sharmishtha and pats her on the back. Sees Yayati approaching, immediately lets go of Sharmishtha and pushes her away. Surprised, Sharmishtha looks first at Devayani, then at Yayati)*

YAYATI *(Coming forward)* Forgive me. Returning from hunting, I came here in search of water. I had no intention of disturbing this affectionate meeting of sisters.

DEVAYANI *(Back to her original mood)* There is no need to apologize; and she is not my sister, either.

YAYATI *(Looking at Sharmishtha)* It looked like that from a distance...

DEVAYANI *(Realizing what he is looking at)* She's not my sister. She's my *dasi.*

YAYATI *(Still looking at Sharmishtha)* What luck to have such a *dasi!*

DEVAYANI *(Persisting)* I am Devayani, the beloved daughter of Shukracharya, the Asuras' Guru. And she is Sharmishtha, the

daughter of King Vrishaparva, my father's subject. She is my attendant.

YAYATI *(Looking at Devayani curiously)* If the Asura King's daughter is your *dasi*, there must be an interesting story behind it.

DEVAYANI You can hear it. But only those who don't know it will be curious. Sharmishtha knows the whole story. She need not be here. *(To Sharmishtha)* Why are you standing here? This does not concern you. *(Sharmishtha goes. Yayati is still watching her)* Since you seem to be more interested in the *dasi* than in the story, I would like to know--who you are?

YAYATI *(Facing her)* I am Yayati, Nahusha's son, a Kshatriya king. I came here to hunt.

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* But this is not a hunting ground.

YAYATI *(As though he has missed the context)* What did you say? *(Suddenly the idea strikes him)* Oh, I came here to look for water.

DEVAYNI May be the King has a very convenient memory.

YAYATI What did you say, Brahmin maiden?

DEVAYANI Sometime back King Yayati was here on a hunt. At that time too he came to this place looking for water. Then a Brhamin girl had fallen into the pool...

YAYATI *(Interrupting)* I know. I also know that you are the same Brahmin girl. But I said nothing because I thought that perhaps you were now another man's wife. If I was at fault, it was fear of conventions. Forgive me.

DEVAYANI The conventions that keep you from speaking to a wife--don't they apply to a *dasi*?

YAYATI You must agree my curiosisty was justified. You told me she was a King's daughter. The moment I saw her, I knew she was no *dasi*.

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* She is not a *dasi*, nor am I another's wife.

YAYATI *(Startled by the change of subject)* You- what did you say?

DEVAYANI I said, I am not another man's wife.

YAYATI Oh! Is that so?

DEVAYANI The king's curiosity seems suited to his convenience.

YAYATI Why? What is...?

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* When I told you I was not another's wife, you were not curious enough to ask me why.

YAYATI Oh, no! How can I ask...

DEVAYANI *(Completing his words)*... because of your fear of conventions? In that case, let me tell you. Devayani remains single because of that day's experience.

YAYATI *(Not understanding)* What experience?

DEVAYANI This same King Yayati came here once. The experience of that day! Or don't you remember it? Nobody had dared to look at Devayani, Guru Shukracharya's daughter, nobody had dared even to touch her hand. But that day, when she fell into the pool, King Yayati held her by the hand and brought her out. For whatever reason it may be, once Devayani's hand has been held by a person, she can't think of anyone else, not even in her dreams.

YAYATI *(Startled)* What? What are you trying to say? I am a king. It is my dharma as a Kshatriya to protect those in distress.

DEVAYANI Would I have died if you had not held my hand and brought me out?

YAYATI That was a hand offered to help a helpless woman.

DEVAYANI But it was your hand, wasn't it? To you it was a hand offered in help, but for me--a girl--it was a hand that touched me. That was the difference.

YAYATI Oh, no! What kind of thoughts are these?

DEVAYANI Why? Will another man want to touch my hand that has been touched by you?

YAYATI Devayani, stop thinking in this way. A king is like a father to his subjects...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* I have a father. I have enough experience of a father's hand. The hand that pulled me out of the pool that day was not a father's hand. It was the hand of a warrior, the hand of a Kshatriya youth...

YAYATI *(Interrupting)* It was a Kshatriya hand, true. That's exactly why a Brhamin girl like you should not understand it wrongly. It is not right, it's not just, it does not accord with Dharma...

DEVAYANI Moreover, it was a hand I loved. When I love, how can there by any wrong understanding? When there is mutual love, doesn't it become right? Isn't it just? Isn't it in accordance with Dharma?

YAYATI Don't talk of mutual love, Devayani! I'm scared. I'm afraid of your father, I'm frightened of the sin of caste-mingling.

DEVAYANI Oh, king, I'm the one who is wooing you.

YAYATI But without the permission of your father...

DEVAYANI Since I am wooing you...

YAYATI *(Interrupting)* Devayani, I am not only a Kshatriya youth, I am also a king. A king's conduct should provide an ideal for his subjects, don't you agree?

DEVAYANI Do you think that a marriage based on mutual liking is not ideal conduct? Oh, king, think before you speak. If you want your subjects to have a happy family life, you won't regard love as improper.

YAYATI Devayani, I'm a king. I know very well that there is no connection between mutual love and marriage. Love is a law of Nature while marriage is a human way. Devayani, it is not right to apply Nature's laws to man.

DEVAYANI And if my father willingly gives me away?

YAYATI But there's still the sin of inter--caste alliance.

DEVAYANI I will absolve you of that sin too. *(Goes to the edge of the stage)* Father! Father!

SHUKRA *(Entering)* What is it, my child? What do you want?

DEVAYANI Your blessings!

SHUKRA *(With a smile)* Who wants them?

DEVAYANI *(Leading him to Yayati)* Both of us.

Yayati greets him

DEVAYANI Some time back when I was in trouble, this Kshatriya king held my hand and saved me. I will not marry anyone else except him. I pray to you, give me in marriage to him.

SHUKRA Kshatriya hero, you are fortunate. My daughter has chosen you of her own free will. I give her to you with pleasure.

YAYATI *(With folded hands)* Oh great Brahmin, bless me so that I don't commit the sin of caste-mingling.

SHUKRA *(Surprised)* The sin of caste-mingling? That's an irrelevant thought. Why do you even think of it? If two unlike objects come together, it is a sinful mingling. But when two beings come together in love, it's no such thing, King Yayati, it's creation. *(Looking inside)* Come, Sharmishtha, you also have to keep your word. *(He brings her out. To Yayati)* This is Devayani's companion and *dasi.* She has promised to be her *dasi* and companion even after I give Devayani away in marriage. Take her with you. Devayani is your wife, but treat Sharmishtha too with affection and respect. But be careful, you cannot have any secret affair with her.

The stage becomes dark. In the darkness Shukracharya's voice can be heard

SHUKRACHARYA'S VOICE

Accept this beautiful slim-waisted Devayani as your wife according to Dharma. Give her your unstained love

And this maiden Sharmishtha, the daughter of King Vrishaparva

Treat her with respect but never let her share your bed.

As the words are over, the stage is now visible. Sutradhara and the Actor come out as if they have been listening to the conversation

SUTRADHARA Did you hear?

ACTOR Yes, I did! Shukracharya said, 'Marry Devayani. Keep Sharmishtha with you, and look after her with affection.'

SUTRADHARA Don't forget he said something more.

ACTOR I remember, I was going to say it. He said don't look at Sharmishtha with desirous eyes.

SUTRADHARA *(Surprised)* Don't look how?

ACTOR He said don't look at her with eyes of desire. Was I wrong?

SUTRADHARA You are not only right, you have put it in the proper way. More than that, it is the voice of inspiration.

ACTOR *(Laughing)* Inspired? A person like me?

SUTRADHARA What do you mean 'a person like me?' Do you think inspiration holds a *swayamvara* and chooses a suitor like Draupadi did?

ACTOR The words just slipped out. Actually I spoke without thinking.

SUTRADHARA That is exactly what inspiration is. The smaller the gap between an idea and its expression, the closer it is to inspiration. To the listener, the words...

ACTOR *(Interrupting)* Never mind that. I want to know about the story. Surely we can now say that Devayani's story is over?

SUTRADHARA *(Surprised)* Over? Why?

ACTOR What's left now? First she loved Kacha who rejected her. Then she made herself believe that she loved Yayati and married him. There's Devayani who was disappointed in love and Yayati who's in love with another.

SUTRADHARA So, what do you think?

ACTOR It's not just me--ask anyone and they'll say the same thing. Yayati is sure to forget Devayani and go to Sharmishtha. Devayani is bound to lose... *(Sutradhara laughs)* Why? What is it?

SUTRADHARA At first, Devayani thought so too.

ACTOR *(Surprised)* At first? Do you think that finally Devayani will win?

SUTRADHARA *(Laughing)* You'll have the same opinion after you've seen the entire play.

ACTOR Anyway what's left in the play? May be, just to please the spectators, you can have a scene in which Yayati and Sharmishtha get married. And then you can say that they had a great many children and lived happily for a thousand years. Ha ha.

SUTRADHARA Nataraya, this play began with your inspiration and mine. If it had come out of deliberate thought, we could have ended that way. But there's inspiration, don't forget inspiration.

ACTOR *(Laughing)* I thought inspiration leaves no room for remembering.

SUTRADHARA You've spoken the truth. And if this is your thought, it was King Yayati's experience.

ACTOR *(Surprised)* Oh! Was King Yayati inspired?

SUTRADHARA Of course! Listen. He married Devayani and brought her along with Sharmishta to his capital. *(The stage gets gradually dark. Sutradhara's voice comes out of the darkness.)* Devayani lived in the women's rooms. But where was Sharmishtha to live? He asked Devayani herself the question. With her consent, he made arrangements for Sharmishtha to live near the Asoka forest. Devayani and Yaytai are living happily. Devayani has a son named Yadu. Sharmishtha continues to live near the forest. Yayati and Sharmishtha have not seen each other for a long time. One day when

Sharmishtha is walking in the Asoka forest... *(The stage gradually brightens. The curtain goes up. Sutradhara and the Actor are not seen. The scene appears according to the Sutradhara's next words)* King Yayati is walking near the Asoka forest. Suddenly they see each other. Sharmishtha looks down, she is smiling. Yayati stands where he is, wonder struck. Ssh! I think the scene is going to progress. *(Sutradhara's gradually descending voice suddenly ceases)*

For a moment a still picture of the two looking at one another

YAYATI *(Comes forward slowly and in a confidential tone)* Sharmishtha!

SHARMISHTHA *(Turns her face away)* Welcome to the King!

YAYATI *(In a plaintive tone)* Sharmishtha, Sharmishtha, why did you call me here?

SHARMISHTHA *(as above)* Devayani told me you would come without an invitation. That's why I never invited you.

YAYATI *(Sighing)* That's right! You did not invite me; yet I am here.

SHARMISHTHA *(Still looking away)* I had decided that you should never come; but I was so sure you would come that I have come to greet you. *(To herself)* Devayani had already told me this.

YAYTI *(Taken aback)* What? What did Devayani tell you?

SHARMISHTHA *(Suddenly turns towards Yayati and faces him)* I didn't understand her when she told me. She said, 'You are my rival. I am just the crude mechanism, Sanjivani, that gives life to the dead. You are my rival who will lure away the Lord of Creation by offering him happiness instead of the realities of life.' Poor thing! The moment she said 'lure away', I was sure I would do it.

YAYATI *(As though ruminating over the idea)* Sanjivani! That which gives life to the dead! Sanjivani! The crude mechanism that brings back life.

SHARMISHTHA Yes! I didn't understand then; now I do. One life is over, another has begun. Sanjivani is fulfilled. Yes, I have won over Devayani's Lord.

YAYATI *(Scared)* One life is over! Whose life was that?

SHARMISHTHA Your life!

YAYATI *(Even more scared)* What did you say? My life is over?

SHARMISHTHA *(Ignoring his words)* Your life is over as far as she is concerned. Another life has been created in her womb. Sanjivani has been effective.

YAYATI Sharmishtha, Sharmishtha, my life is not over. You are my life, Sharmishtha...

SHARMISHTHA Your life is over as far as Devayani is concerned.

YAYATI *(Sighing)* Now life comes back to me. Sharmishtha, you have given fresh life to Yayati. You have given him back his youth. I am ready to wait for you, considering myself eternally young. But... but...

SHARMISHTHA But what?

YAYATI I am also a king.

SHARMISHTHA You will perform your kingly duties.

YAYATI I should be an ideal for my subjects. If I break that promise to myself... If I act false...

SHARMISHTHA *(Interrupting)* False? Where does that come from?

YAYATI At the time of our marriage, I gave Devayani my word...

SHARMISHTHA *(Smiling)* If you can't keep that word, it's not a sin. Do I need to tell you the rules of conduct, King? A lie which is told in good humour or during marriage, a lie told to women or when life is in danger, a lie told when you are losing all your wealth is not a sin...

YAYATI *(Interrupting)* Sharmishtha, these words don't apply to a king. A king who is himself the maker of laws...

SHARMISHTHA *(Interrupting)*... Should also obey the law, shouldn't he? Then, listen to me. A wife, a slave and a son have no wealth of their own. Their wealth is their lord's wealth--so

say the scriptures. I'm Devayani's *dasi*, I'm her property; Devayani, your wife, is your property. Therefore, I, who am Devayani's property, am also your property. Don't break the law, don't go against the scriptures.

YAYATI *(Stares at her for moment)* You say it is in accordance with the scriptures? *(Holds her hand, but drops it immediately)* To hold your hands is to remember Devayani. The moment I remember her, I draw back. Sharmishtha, the mind draws me back, but the body trembles with eagerness.

SHARMISHTHA *(With a smile)* I know. Devayani had said this too.

YAYATI *(Surprised)* What? She told you this as well?

SHARMISHTHA Yes. She said, 'There is some magnetic power in you that attracts the beauty of the world, absorbs it and becomes even more charming.' She said I create beauty instead of truth. I did not understand this then; now I do. Your mind draws back because there is no truth; your body trembles with eagerness because there is beauty.

YAYATI *(Gazing at her)* There is beauty? And no truth?

SHARMISHTHA That's what Devayani said.

YAYATI *(To himself)* No truth! Only beauty!

SHARMISHTHA But it's wrong.

YAYATI *(Suddenly looks at her)* What did you say?

SHARMISHTHA Devayani was wrong. Beauty is the truth of creation. Otherwise, why would nature get rid of what is not beautiful, what is not useful? And would Sanjivani have moved from plants to man? Plants are helpless, they grow anywhere, they get their nutrition from whatever is around them; but man takes birth in safe places, he grows by eating what is good for him and is capable of protecting himself.

YAYATI *(Scared)* Sharmishtha, what is this? Whose words are these? What are you saying?

SHARMISHTHA *(Looking up blankly)* I am beauty; I am not Sanjivani's rival, I am it's inspiration. I am beauty...

YAYATI *(Inspired)* I am youth...

SHARMISHTHA I am the flavour...

YAYATI I am enjoyment...

SHARMISHTHA I am eternal...

YAYATI I am ever new...

SHARMISHTHA *(Suddenly looks at him)* True! What is eternal.

YAYATI True, true!

As he says this, the stage becomes dark. Sutradhara's voice

SUTRADHARA When she said so, the King accepted it as the truth. He honoured Sharmishtha and observed the religious rule. United with Sharmishtha, he fulfilled his heart's desire. They came together and then went their separate ways. And with that union with the King, the beautiful--eyed, smiling Sharmishtha conceived her first child.

The stage becomes bright on the repetition of the last sentence. The curtain goes up. The scene is the Asokavana. A youth stands enjoying the beauty of nature. Just then Yayati's voice is heard, calling out, 'Devayani! Devayani!' Devayani comes hurriedly and is surprised to see the youth. She stands looking at him. Meanwhile Yayati enters

YAYATI Devayani, Devayani! *(Noticing the youth coming forward to greet him, he stops him by raising his hand. The youth retreats. Surprised, Devayani turns back and sees Yayati. Behind her back, the youth greets Yayati with folded hands. Devayani sees Yayati's fear and turns to look at the youth. She looks at them suspecting some secret. Yayati ignores it.)* Devayani, you wanted to walk in a solitary place, didn't you? Let's go somewhere else.

DEVAYANI *(As though she has not heard him)* Who is this handsome boy? How did he come to the Asoka forest? *(To the youth)* Young man, who are you? What is your name?

YOUTH Devi Devayani, my name is Puru.

DEVAYANI Puru? Who is the lucky mother of such a handsome son?

YOUTH My mother's name... *(Yayati slips away)*... my mother's name is Sharmishtha.

DEVAYANI *(As though struck by lightning)* What did you say? *(Turns round and not seeing Yayati, irritated)* Who did you say your mother is? Sharmishtha? My *dasi* Sharmishtha?

PURU She may be your *dasi*, But to me and to my two elder brothers she is our respected mother.

DEVAYANI *(Even more surprised)* Two elder brothers?

PURU Yes, Devi. I have two elder brothers--Druhya and Anu.

DEVAYANI Two older sons and you--so that whore has three sons!

PURU *(Sternly)* Beware, Devi! My revered mother's curse will affect your tongue!

DEVAYANI *(Unable to control her anger)* Your revered mother! And who is her Lord? She may know it, but do you? Do you know your father's name?

PURU *(Calmly)* Of course we know. King Yayati is our...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupts angrily)* Stop it! The king may be a father to all his subjects...

PURU *(Interrupting)* We are not his subjects! We are his legitimate sons!

DEVAYANI That's what I said- bastards!

PURU Devi, that word on your tongue...

DEVAYANI *(Interrupting)* That word is not enough for my tongue. Not just bastards, but sons of a traitor, of a liar...

PURU *(Suddenly)* Amma... Amma... Amma...

SHARMISHTHA *(Entering)* What is it, my son? *(Looks at Devayani)* Oh!

PURU *(Angrily)* Amma, I'm trying to control myself because this lady looks respectable, but she's using foul words, she's abusing you. Amma, tell me...

SHARMISHTHA *(Soothing him)* Puru, my son, calm down. She's my mistress. We know each other very well. The mistress has the right to abuse the *dasi.* Calm yourself and go out. I'll talk to her.

Puru looks at Devayani with furious eyes and goes out. All this while Devayani has been watching the scene between mother and son with contempt. When Puru goes out, she talks to Sharmishtha who has been closely observing her

DEVAYANI After all, you are a *dasi.*

SHARMISHTHA True, Devayani.

DEVAYANI A *dasi* can only have a bastard.

SHARMISHTHA Do you know who is the father of my sons, Devayani?

DEVAYANI That illegitimate brat told me, but I won't believe it.

SHARMISHTHA Devayani, aren't you hurting yourself by using such words?

DEVAYANI Then, shall I accept the traitor?

SHARMISHTHA *(Not understanding)* Traitor?

DEVAYANI Not just traitor, but a whore.

SHARMISHTHA *(Surprised)* Whore? Who?

DEVAYANI *(With intense anger)* Who else? You! You! You!

SHARMISHTHA *(With a contemptuous smile)* Really? I, who married the man I love am being called a prostitute and you, who loved one and married another, are the virtuous wife!

DEVAYANI *(Bursting out)* No, no, you are a prostitute! Wanton woman! Don't utter my name. I married the man I loved.

SHARMISHTHA *(Laughing with contempt)* Marriage?

DEVAYANI *(Mimicking her)* Marriage! Don't pollute that word! Marriage is with only one person; but those who don't marry have many masters. Anyone...

SHARMISHTHA *(Taunting her)* Master? And who is the master of your house? King Yayati? Or Kacha? Kacha, who slapped you when you begged him to marry you and went away? Or the innocent Yayati whom you clung to because he held your hand? Who--who is the master of your house?

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly breaks down)* Aiyyo! Why do you go on torturing me? Once you pushed me angrily into a pool of water. Today you are pushing me into a well of sorrow. How have I wronged you that you torture me like this?

SHARMISHTHA You've done me no wrong. *(Devayani looks at her in surprise)* No, you have not wronged me. You, a Brahmin's daughter, desired the Kshatriya Yayati. You cursed Kacha whom you loved and made him hate you. You scared Yayati, whom you did not love, into marrying you and made him hate you. You've only wronged yourself, no one else. You don't know what love is; it's you who are the whore, Devayani, you're the whore.

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly provoked)* Love? What love? Who wants love? A woman's only duty is Sanjivani–to bring new life in place of the old. Nature's law says union is only for creation. The rest is enjoyment. Love!

SHARMISHTHA *(Suddenly remembers something)* Enjoyment? Enjoyment! When I said I was the flavour, didn't he say he was enjoyment?

DEVAYANI *(Irritated at not understanding)* What now? What are you babbling? To use and throw away- that is enjoyment. Do you understand?

SHARMISHTHA *(Absorbed in her own thought)* Did you say that to enjoy is to use and discard? Does that mean that when I'm no longer enjoyable, I will be discarded?

DEVAYANI *(Happy that she has made her unhappy)* That dear sister, is your love. As long as your body is succulent and brim-

ming with youth, as long as your eyes sparkle with coquettishness and your lips are luscious and red you will be used. When your body is withered and your youth has drained away, when your eyes are sunken and your lips dry- then you will be discarded. That is enjoyment. Love is the magic spell used by men to achieve this.

SHARMISHTHA *(Her body is now trembling)* Is love a magic spell cast by men? *(Suddenly)* No, no! It's not just that. I love him don't I? *(Irritated by Devayani's loud laugh)* When my love is genuine, how can his be a magic spell? No, love is not witchcraft, it is not anyone's magic. *(With great hatred, to Devayani)* You're only a mechanical Sanjivani, you can't understand the rejuvenation of love. You are an instrument, a lifeless instrument, only an instrument.

DEVAYANI *(Suddenly calm)* True, I am an instrument. Woman is the instrument, man the technique to carry out Nature's laws.

SHARMISHTHA You are a heartless woman, you have no feelings for others.

DEVAYANI *(Laughing)* Feelings are to save oneself, not others.

SHARMISHTHA *(Suddenly breaks down)* Why did you put these doubts in my mind? Why have you poured poison into my heart? Whatever his love may be, tell me that my love at least is not just a magic spell. Give me that assurance.

DEVAYANI *(Moving away)* I give you an assurance? You could not keep your word; how can I give you any assurance? You have spread the poison of love in my world of duty. Do you think Yayati loves you? Do you imagine that he desires you? You are only an excuse for him to reject me. It is not love for you, it is not–wanting me... You have destroyed my trust in you. Yayati too–he has broken the promise he made my father. I don't want love; but I will not be satisfied until I destroy what you think is your love. *(Suddenly)* Father! Father! *(Exits. The stage is dark for a minute to show the lapse of time. When the lights come on, Shukracharya is standing with Yayati by his side and Devayani in front. Devayani is sobbing while she speaks)*

DEVAYANI Father, finally evil has won. Injustice seems to be justice. Sharmishtha has cheated me. She has had children by Yayati. And yet he calls himself a righteous king.

SHUKRA *(To Yayati)* How did you, a righteous person, who knows what is right, come to do such wrong.?

YAYATI Oh great Brahmin, who can say what is Dharma and what is Adharma?

SHUKRA King, when it is certain that Dharma provides steadfastness...

YAYATI *(Interrupting)* Forgive me, oh Guru of the Suras and Asuras, I used to think so too. But nature's laws...

SHUKRA *(Irritated)* Nature's laws? That's for animals, not for thinking humans.

YAYATI Oh Great Brahmin, I'll tell you if you don't mind hearing. True, animals don't have brains and humans have them. But man has body the same as animals, doesn't he? There has to be some Dharma that gives the power of sustaining the body. When the desire of sex is itself the dharma in youth...

SHUKRA *(Interrupting, thunders)* Yayati, stop your discussion on Dharma! When you were young, was enjoyment of sex your Dharma? Has the intoxication of youth made you forget your promise? Then listen! Since you are unworthy of youth, may old age come to you soon...

DEVAYANI *(Scared)* Father! Father! *(The stage becomes dark but the scene continues)*

YAYATI Great Brahmin, I am not scared of your curse; I am not scared of old age. But you have come in the way of my attempts to understand the body's Dharma.

SHUKRA The body has only one obligation--to bring into existence another life. As soon as a new life begins, the old life must make way: this and this only is the body's Dharma.

YAYATI Shukracharya, you are known as a poet. At least for the sake of that title, give me a chance to satisfy my curiosity.

SHUKRA What are you curious about?

YAYATI If old age comes so soon, it will be like putting my curiosity in the shadows.

SHUKRA *(Adamantly)* Tell me what you are curious about.

YAYATI Let me have youth for a longer time, let me have more time to learn about the body's Dharma.

SHUKRA *(Shaking his head)* Not possible. Old age will engulf you very soon as I have said. There's only one way of putting it off.

YAYATI *(With hope)* Tell me what that remedy is.

SHUKRA If you insist, listen. If, of your five children...

YAYATI *(Interrupts, disappointed)* The first two are Devayani's...

SHUKRA *(Persisting)* If one of these five children gives you his youth and takes your old age on instead, you will get his youth.

YAYATI *(As if he has been saved)* I have been favoured, Great Brahmin!

SHUKRACHARAYA'S VOICE *(In the darkness)*

Oh, son of Nahusha, concentrate on me, you will avoid old age as you desire, you will not commit a sin.

The son who offers you his youth will become the king, he will live long. He will get fame and will have many sons.

When the voice ceases, the stage is bright. Only Yayati can be seen. He looks old

YAYATI *(Looks around hopefully)* The great Brahmin has favoured me. *(Goes to side and looks in)* Did you hear, Yadu? You are my eldest son. I will ask you first. If you give me your youth in exchange for my old age, you will get a kingdom, fame and virtue as the great Brahmin said,. What do you say?

YADU'S VOICE Old age has many flaws. Eating and drinking is no pleasure. If a white haired withered old body is made to

work, it snaps like a dry stick. Father, forgive me, I don't want your old age, I want none of that virtue, either.

YAYATI *(Cursing him)* May you rot without getting my kingdom! *(He goes to the other side and peeps in)* Turvasu, you are my second son. Do you wish to go to hell like your elder brother? Or will you go to heaven by obeying your father and exchanging your life with him?

TURVASA'S VOICE Father, old age takes away desire for sex, beauty and strength, it affects the brain and finally takes away life. I don't want that old age, I want no part of that heaven.

YAYATI *(Cursing him too)* You are my son and you refuse to give me your youth! May you fall into the company of low people! *(Surprised)* You said you want nothing of heaven! Yadu too said he wants to have nothing to do with virtue. Do Devayani's sons find heaven and virtue unbearable? *(Now looks in the third direction)* Now let me ask Druhya. Druhya, don't behave like your brothers. They are your stepbrothers. Will you be more worthy and agree to this exchange?

DRUHYA'S VOICE Father, I don't want old age; you can't sit on an elephant, you can't travel in a chariot, you can't ride a horse. You sit in one place and think of the past.

YAYATI *(Curses him)* Oh you wretch! May you be born in a land without elephants and horses, in a place where there are only donkeys and camels! Oh, Anu--

ANU'S VOICE *(Interrupting)* Father, I don't want old age. No! A toothless mouth swallowing food like a baby at any odd time-no, I don't want it.

YAYATI *(Cursing him)* Are you so scared of old age? Then may your subjects all die young! *(Silence for a moment)*

YAYATI *(Now looking around desperately)* Four of the five have refused. Only one is left. Will he also say 'No' and leave me to die in despair? Or, shall I refrain from asking him. and just hold on to the hope that he will agree? Oh, no! The delay will only make me older. I'll go ahead and ask the youngest one. *(A sudden thought)* Puru is the last, the youngest,

he is too young to understand. What if he agrees without understanding? *(Taking courage)* He will get kingdom, fame, virtue, heaven, won't he? Why should I fear when the Guru of the Asuras has given a boon? *(Looks inside)* Pu... *(Stops)* Am I afraid because this is my last chance, or has the poison of old age already entered into me? My voice seems to have become weak. *(Closes his eyes with the desperation of a frightened man)* Kumara, Puru...

PURU *(Entering)* Father, command me.

YAYATI *(In a hurried voice)* Listen, my son, if you want kingdom, fame and heaven, your father is ready to do anything for you. And more, I have already obtained a boon about this from Shukracharya--if you agree to the exchange...

PURU *(Smiling, he interrupts)* Father, I have no desire for a kingdom, I don't dream of fame, nor do I need the reward of heaven. I am ready to obey you and to carry out what the Guru's boon requires. I am ready to accept your old age along with the sin. I will accept your old age with its looks and give you my youth.

YAYATI *(Surprised)* Child, do you understand what you are saying? I don't want the world to say that I have deceived you. Do you really have no desire for youth?

PURU Father, if I desire something, let it be something un attainable. But youth is inevitable for all those who are born; there is no need to desire it.

YAYATI Don't say that, child; youth may be only for the body, but don't forget that the body is the instrument of pleasure. What if the instrument fails too soon? When we feel that there is so much to enjoy and youth is far too short...

PURU Oh king! I don't think so. The body has greater possibilities than just enjoyment.

YAYATI *(Surprised)* What? When there are so many pleasures...

PURU Yes, but the body is eternal. Enjoyment has a beginning and end. But the body...

YAYATI *(Interrupting)* Puru, the body is also transient.

PURU *(Continues)* Yes, but it is also permanent. I was born with the sensual pleasures that you, my father, enjoyed. Just as I tasted the earlier pleasures through my father's body, I will savour the later ones through my children. For the present pleasures, this body is enough, this time of youth is enough.

YAYATI *(Laughing as though he has understood everything)* Present pleasures? My son, there is no limit of time for pleasures. It is for all time, for eternity.

PURU *(Laughs)* Father, I too am eternal.

YAYATI *(Surprised)* You, eternal? Why? I mean how?

PURU Only ask why, don't ask me 'how?' How can you, an elder, ask 'how'? You, who are my past, don't you know I am eternal?

YAYATI *(More surprised)* I? Your past?

PURU Why are you surprised? Don't you know I am your experience? Your body is my body. Your experiences and mine, your body and mine- they are for your grandchildren, my children.

YAYATI *(Shaking his head)* Experience! Experience! My son, the body savours physical pleasures. Experience no longer matters to me. If my body becomes old, I will miss the taste of pleasure. I have not had enough of enjoyment, that is why I want youth for my body. What I don't have your body has.

PURU Haven't I just given it to you?

YAYATI *(Surprised)* Just given? Where is it?

PURU The outward signs are not yet visible, but your old age has already crept into my body. The experience of old age, which clings like sins, has come to me. It is that experience which is telling you...

YAYATI *(Interrupting)* Son, keep that experience, I want your youthful body.

PURU But respected one, the body's youthfulness is limited...

YAYATI *(Laughing)* That is why I asked for your youth and got it.

PURU But even my youth is limited, isn't it?

YAYATI Once that is over, I will ask for another.

PURU But the body?

YAYATI Don't I have a body? The body will be mine, the youth borrowed. The savour of happiness will be mine, the means of tasting it will be borrowed. Whenever the means falter, I will ask for another.

PURU Respected one, surely you know that the body which tastes physical pleasures cannot escape old age.

YAYATI *(Laughs)* How foolish of you, my son! That is exactly why I want to put off old age and enjoy a multitude of pleasures.

PURU But as the pressure of pleasures increases, old age approaches faster.

YAYATI *(Taken aback)* What did you say?

PURU The longer the period of youth, the faster the advance of old age. In the bright light of life, old age is the shadow of youth. What kind of life is it if you are afraid of shadows?

YAYATI *(As though it does not concern him)* The sweetness of desire is like the midday sun. There is no fear of any shadow.

PURU But there is always the fear that the afternoon is slipping away. Youth is always frightened, frightened of old age. But for old age, youth is a sweet memory. Old age with its sweet memories has more comfort, more happiness than youth with all its fears.

YAYATI *(As though considering this idea)* Is youth frightened of old age? Does the experience of pleasures mean the beginning of old age? So when I'm trying to avoid old age, am I actually inviting old age? Is youth endless?

PURU If youth is endless, fear of old age is also endless.

YAYATI Can't we avoid old age altogether?

PURU If we do that, there is never any satiation of pleasures, Father.

YAYATI *(Not understanding, is taken aback)* No, it's not possible? It can't be so!

PURU Oh King! You say you want satiation of pleasures. But satiation itself is old age.

YAYATI *(Suddenly)* No, no! I don't ever want old age!

PURU In that case, you will never know satiation.

YAYATI *(Desperately)* Can one not get peace from physical pleasures?

DEVAYANI *(Enters all of a sudden)* Now my Sanjivani is fulfilled.

YAYATI *(Still desperate)* But the hope of physical desire continues to torment me.

SHARMISHTHA *(Entering all of a sudden)* That is love.

PURU No, where there is fear, there is no love.

YAYATI *(Does not understand him)* Where there is fear, there is no love? *(Suddenly)* Puru, please take your youth back, give me back my experience. My experience! Now, I understand! Where there is fear, there cannot be love. Where you fear old age, there is no love of youth. How true! Where there is love of youth, fear of old age is inevitable.

DEVAYANI Sanjivani is old age which destroys itself and creates new youth.

SHARMISHTHA Love, according to Nature's laws, sprouts from enjoyment and grows through sacrifice- this love is Sanjivani.

YAYATI Now I can speak from experience. Listen to me. Living as if you are not you--that is Sanjivani. *(As the curtain comes down)*

YAYATI'S VOICE Just as the flames rise higher when fed with ghee, there is no happiness and satisfaction after experiencing physical pleasures

Even if a man is given all the grain in the world, all the gold, the cattle and all beautiful women,

He is not satisfied. Desire should therefore be renounced.

The curtain comes down, Sutradhara and Actor standing in front, Sutradhara, his back to the speactators, as if listening to what has been going on. The Actor is staring at him.

SUTRADHARA *(Turns and faces the Actor)* That is how experience came to Yayati.

ACTOR Experience came to Yayati? What does that mean?

SUTRADHARA *(Laughs)* Old age came to him and he accepted it at last!

ACTOR *(Thinking)* Now I understand!

SUTRADHARA *(With a smile)* Now that you have understood, the play is over.

They greet each other with folded hands and exit from opposite sides of the stage

The End

RANGABHARATA

THE BACKGROUND

As the title clearly indicates, the play attempts to bring on to the stage the story of the *Bharata.* But the story serves merely as the background. The content of the play--its thought, subject matter and ethos--everything is modern. Though the characters here, with the exception of two, are given their original names, it must be realized that apart from a couple of situations, the costume, language and appearance of the characters are modern.

A play is a work of literature. It is said that it must be filled with the nine rasas. Bhaovabhuti, the dramatist, asserts a play should contain more then one rasa. I cannot say how many rasas are there in the play but it certainly can produce many outside. It should hardly surprise me if some among the audience find in it exaggeration, some grotesque humour, some acid satire and some extreme impropriety. The primary reason for this is the style of writing I practised some twenty or twentyfive years ago and the thought I professed at that time. Many self-appointed critics allege that my thought and style have not changed in all these years. This is something that puzzles me. In this play there is not a single instance of making fun of any great text. There is no satire on heroic persons.

There is in it an attempt to evaluate the values of life in the context of today from a comprehensive perspective.

This play may be produced in any manner one likes--in a theatre, on an open air stage, by night or by day, with or without costumes and makeup. There is plenty of scope here for the intelligence and ingenuity of a producer and director. As opposed to my usual habit I have refrained from offering detailed stage instructions. Special curtains or *apatis* may be used if it is not possible to provide for proper lighting arrangements.

Producers shouldn't have a problem in producing the play, because it is entirely new to the Kannada theatre. Fortunately for me, there have been no plays to date that demand the use of stagecraft. Commercial plays have been flourishing without any meaningful involvement in literature, society and art. Their sole goal has been making money. Their utility for contemporary Kannada or Kannada drama is marginal. (Ignorant imitation is the height of their achievement). Yet, as Dhritarastra says at the end of this play, creating an illusion of happiness which is absent is the distinctive feature of this age of publicity. The illusion of the existence of a theatre amidst us is created by commercial plays which thrive in a cultural vacuum and titillating drama which flourishes in town devoid of literary culture. It is the belief and hope of the writer of this play that it will educate the uneducated and bring culture to the uncultured.

Sriranga

RANGABHARATA

(1965)

Translated by K. Raghavendra Rao

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

1. I have tried to keep as close as possible to the original departing rarely and marginally when I felt that a literal translation failed to carry the spirit of the original.
2. I have left the Sanskrit bits untranslated because, in the original, they stand as they are, untranslated into the language of the rest of the text.
3. As always, I must acknowledge with gratitude the benefit of my wife, Prabha's scholarship.

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

Dhritarashtra

Sanjaya

Duryodhana

Krishna

Arjuna

Bhishma

Bheema

Karna

Dharma

Vidura

A Man

A Woman

A Voice

The play was first produced by the Karnataka Theatres Association of Bombay on 8.5.1965 at the auditorium of Jai Hind College.

On the outskirts of a village, on a platform beneath a tree; Dhritarashtra (Dhartiratteppa, aged 80) lies to a side, half reclining; Sanjaya (Sanjappa, aged 75) is lighting his pipe; the time is the time when the birds return to their nests.

DHRITARASHTRA *(as if in a dream)* Hello, Sanjaya...

SANJAYA *(Rises abruptly and respectfully joining his palms)* Command me, my liege Dhritarashtra. Tell me your wish...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Smiling, just waking up)* 'Liege'! 'Liege', did you say? *(Laughing loudly)* 'Liege Dhritarashtra'! Ha! Ha!

SANJAYA *(As if he also catches the irony smiling, unavoidably)* I forgot. Well, Dhartiratteppa--*(in the process of squatting)*

DHRITARASHTRA *(Trying to hold back his laughter)* Of course, you haven't forgotten, Sanjappa. But it is night time now, and I am feeling drowsy. But the time to sleep is the time to dream. As they say, mind is a monkey. Well, that monkey is hopping from one branch of dream to another! Haha!

SANJAYA *(Squatting and as if owning his mistake)* Well, that isn't untrue. Instead of saying Sanjappa, you addressed me as 'Sanjaya!' Instantly, my mind jumped back to our friendship in the Dwapara age--

DHRITARASHTRA *(Completing the sentence)* And that you began to regard me as the blind old king of those days!

SANJAYA Yes, indeed! Yes, I clean forgot that you are a modern citizen blind in spite of having eyes!

DHRITARASHTRA Let's skip it! It seems, when you remember things in old age, you feel as if you are regaining your youth! What is wrong with it? But_I forgot what I wanted to tell you! *(Yawning)* Let it be. I am also feeling sleepy. Anyway the memory of our previous life has been stirred. Tell me that old story once again.

SANJAYA They say that stories shouldn't be told when one gets sleepy_

DHRITARASHTRA *(Interrupting)* Of course, I knew it! Great heroes have been formed--after listening to bed-time tales.

SANJAYA *(Interrupting)* But they listened to these stories when they were children, not at your age... Well, wait for a while; I'll tell you the story. One must utter 'Yes' every now and then while listening to a story; but when you go to sleep, how can you do it?

DHRITARASHTRA And the kids....

SANJAYA *(Intervening)* Yes, that's what I mean! When the kids stop uttering 'yes', the story--telling should stop. Right? But the whole point of telling them stories is to put them to sleep. That is convenient, too.

DHRITARASHTRA Well, as you say! I am getting sleep....

SANJAYA That's why I am saying this. Suppose my story captures your mind. Then wouldn't your sleep go away?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Nodding approval)* That's certainly true. After all an old fellow's sleep and the intelligence of one in authority cannot last long... Yes... Then do you suggest that I should just roll and relax.

SANJAYA *(Laughing)* Why should you roll? Do you think we are here under the power of bed--bugs? Or do we have here the bed--bug power of officials?

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if uncomprehending)* What did you say? *(Sanjaya repeats his last two lines. After listening to them, feeling tired)* Who wants to see the acrobatics of words when its time to sleep? It wouldn't enter into my head Sanjappa.

SANJAYA *(Laughing)* That's why I have found out a trick to see that your head is not unduly taxed! It works like this. You should feel that you are listening to the story, and even if you don't actually utter 'yes', I shouldn't feel that you are not listening!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* What is that trick?

SANJAYA Drama.

DHRITARASHTRA What did you say?

SANJAYA I shall narrate to you the drama, after converting the story into a play. In that case, I shall have the satisfaction that you will not be able to intervene during the narration. Even if you sleep I shall be unaware of it, and that should satisfy you!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Enthused)* In that case, tell me our own story from Dwapara age.

SANJAYA *(In a cautious tone)* Well, that tale...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* No, no. That same tale should be told, Sanjappa, the same story...

SANJAYA *(Interrupting him with a raised hand, pausing for a moment and then appearing to have come to a decision).* All right, listen to me attentively.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Diffident.)* Would it be all right if I close my eyes at the start of your narration?

SANJAYA *(As if unmindful, rises and faces the auditorium)*
Suptam darsaturdevam sayanam capi jagmatuhu
Tava putrastu prathamam vasudevamupasrayat

The stage grows completely dark. Slowly at the back, light spreads at a height. In that light is seen Krishna lying, with Arjuna sitting at his feet and Duryodhana at his head. All the three don the costumes characteristic of our commercial theatre. Sanjaya who is to narrate the scene, moves forward–

Ucchirsatasca vai tasya nisasada varasane
Tataha kiriti pascardhe prahvotisthat kritanjalihi.

DURYODHANA *(To Krishna)*

Vigrahesmin bhavan sahyam mama datumiharhati
Aham cabhigatahpurvam tasmaddatum mamarhati

KRISHNA *(Smiling) Bhavanabhigatahpurvam purvadristastvayam maya*

ARJUNA *(With folded hands) Cirarartrepsitam kamam tadbhavan kartumarhati...*

KRISHNA *Narayana iti khyata bhavantvekasya sainikaha*
Ayudhyamanassangrame nyastasastrohamekataha
Abhyamanyataradrajan yatte hridyataram matam
Tad vrinitam (to Arjuna) bhavan agre

ARJUNA *(Folded hands, bowing in reverence)*

Sarathyam tu tvaya karyam iti me manasam sada

SANJAYA *(As all these three rise) Tava putrastu (Total darkness)*

tat sainyam sarvamavarayattada

Spotlight on Sanjaya and Dhritarashtra. As if jolted by that light, Dhritarashtra flutters his eyes. Laughing at his fright--

SANJAYA Why, Dharti, my dear fellow? Did you wake up or the sleep fled? Yes? Ha ha!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Staring hard at him)* So, you are still here

SANJAYA Why? Did you imagine that I left after you slept?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Paying no attention to his words)* That means I had a dream a little while ago. *(As Sanjaya nods his head)* No? Does it mean you, too, saw it? *(Sanjaya nods approval)* There were costumes of folk theatre, right?... Some foreign language?...

SANJAYA *(Laughing)* No, the words were not of a foreign language, Dharteppa. That is why I said we should avoid that story. Didn't you notice? You have forgotten your own words!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Jolted)* My words?

SANJAYA Yes, indeed! That was how you used to speak in the Dwapara... Yes... I didn't think you would forget it in this way. Otherwise I wouldn't have changed the names in that story.

DHRITARASHTRA Look here, Sanjappa, though it is I who slept, you talk as if you are talking in your sleep. What do you mean by forgetting? What names are you referring to?

SANJAYA Who do you think those three persons you saw were?

DHRITARASHTRA Who were they?

SANJAYA One is your son Duryodhana. Another is Arjuna and the sleeping one is Krishna.

DHRITARASHTRA So what? The words were mumbo–jumbo.

SANJAYA *(With a gentle smile)* That was Sanskrit.

DHRITARASHTRA All right. I want a story and you offer me your pedantry! Quite a story–teller! Can't you tell your story in a way a listener can easily follow?

SANJAYA *(Laughing)* Not a story but drama, Dharteppa.

DHRITARASHTRA A story should be told in a manner comprehensible to the listeners and drama should be presented in a manner comprehensible to its viewers!

SANJAYA All right, I'll narrate as simply as I can so that you can follow. I shall show them to you in a way you can recognise them.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Astonished)* You want to show them in a way I can recognize them? That means, without make–up, costumes and the rest?

SANJAYA Now what is the dress you are donning?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Taken aback)* In what dress I... *(Suddenly bursting into laughter)* Damn it! Why do I need make-up and costumes?

SANJAYA *(Continuing in the same strain)* What kind of make-up did you have on?

DHRITARASHTRA Damn it! Do you think I have gone mad?

SANJAYA What do you mean? Are you suggesting that only those on the stage alone can go mad or that they alone must go mad?

DHRITARASHTRA Why should I suggest it? It has become the way of the world. Drama means one should put on make-up and don costumes.

SANJAYA That is exactly why you cannot identify them, Dharteppa.

DHRITARASHTRA That means, without make-up and clothes...

SANJAYA *(Intervening)* Che! Che! You have dishonoured me, Dharteppa, in the eyes of the people, by insinuating that I produce plays with characters without clothes! Haha! God has given every person his or her own colour, is it not so? Also costume suiting their mental make--up?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Suspiciously)* Your words are all right, Sanjappa. But does it look like drama if people come on to the stage, as they are...?

SANJAYA *(As if caught in a fix)* Oh! This too is a knot! If the players are recognizable, then it won't be a play, and if it is to be called a play, one cannot be identified...

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if struck suddenly by a solution)* Yes, Sanjappa, Pandavas and Kauravas figure in our story, not just ordinary folk like you and me. For the moment, that knotty problem doesn't arise.

SANJAYA My dear Dharteppa, are you saying that Kauravas and Pandavas are not beings like us? I thought they too like brothers quarrelled with each other, found themselves gripped by the desire for power, clashed against each other, abused each other, patted each other on the back....

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if suddenly reading the secret)* Yes, Sanjappa, it never occurred to me! *(A little scared)* Well, then, are you saying that they are like us?

SANJAYA Why? If you prefer, I will say that we are like them.

DHRITARASHTRA Then you plan to show them like us? But...

SANJAYA But If they are like us, why give them tongue-twisting names? We shall simply call them Bhishmajja, Viduranna, Dharmappa--and so on. Watch once, and if you think you recognize them, then close your eyes... Yes... Where do I start?

DHRITARASHTRA *(After considering)* Well, because I was a blind person, foreign rulers invaded our kingdom. Then my brother

Pandu fought them, defeated them and won back our kingdom. Isn't that so? Owing to our ill-luck, Pandu died. His children and mine grew up to adulthood. Then one day....

Slowly these two characters fade into darkness. At the same time, light spreads at the centre of the stage and shows an elderly man walking up and down on the spot. At one side of the stage there are some eight or nine persons squatting. Their acquaintance will be made by the audience according to the situation. Confronting them will be another group of three or four persons. The two groups are found engaged in a heated debate. The elderly person has failed to bring about a reconciliation between them. They are dressed in the modern style suiting their age and character.

THE ELDERLY PERSON *(Settling at a spot, staring at the two contesting groups)* All these days, I took care of you and brought you up as members of a single household, taught you to play together, educated you together. In spite of that, you fellows never learnt to think of yourselves as one household, one family! God knows from where you fellows got this idea of breaking up the family. *(He stares at the two groups once again with unconcealed anger.)*

A MEMBER FROM THE GROUP Bhishmajja, why are you so obstinate that we remain united and live together? *(A member from the opposite group laughs in derision. Provoked by Grandpa Bhishma staring at him and the member of the opposite group laughing)* What bugs this Bheema that he should bare his teeth in a snarl?

BHEEMA *(As Bhishma looks at him)* Look grandpa, a crow will always be a crow and a cuckoo always a cuckoo. Please, don't try to make us live together with this Duryappa!

BHISHMA *(Addressing the member from the group at the right who had spoken)* Duryodhana, I am asking you for the last time--why don't you and them rule the kingdom jointly?

ONE FROM THE LEFT GROUP We have no objection, grandpa. If need be, we five brothers will accept any office he gives us.

AN ELDERLY PERSON *(So far invisible, sitting at a distance)* Well I think what Dharmappa has said is fair and just.

DURYODHANA *(Addressing the elderly person)* Uncle, you don't understand these matters. You....

BHISHMA *(Intervening)* You arrogant fellow, you have the conceit to treat your uncle Vidura with disrespect and say that he doesn't understand these matters? The honour and prestige of your household survives to this day because of him!

A THIRD PERSON FROM THE LEFT Otherwise God knows what sorts of persons he would have inducted into our family!

ANOTHER FROM THE RIGHT *(Responding)* You Arjya, I am warning you. Don't you ever take my name!

ARJUNA Mentioning your name will pollute my tongue!

ANOTHER FROM THE RIGHT *(Suddenly rising)* When I say don't.....

DURYODHANA *(Interrupting him)* Karna, don't say anything. I'll take care of him. *(Nobody speaks further, denoting a silence of indecision)*

BHISHMA *(To Vidura)* Did you notice, Viduranna? Do these creatures have pride and self--respect? Do you think these fellows really possess the ability to maintain and carry on the authority and power handed over to them by their elders?

VIDURA Bhishmajja, this is what I think is the present situation, you and nobody, in fact, anticipated. Now why don't you yourself...

BHISHMA *(Stopping him with a raised hand)* Viduranna, you can say anything excepting that. I have given word with an oath that I renounce office...

VIDURA *(Intervening)* But then there was hope that an equal to you could be found. *(Suddenly looking at both the groups)* You are just raw young boys, and you are not mature enough to understand things. You have no idea why your grandpa gave that word and the travails he suffered on your account. You

fellows seem to imagine that the power that has come to you through somebody's grace can be handled recklessly?

DURYODHANA How can you say 'somebody'? That is our father's authority. We are entitled to it under the law!

BHEEMA *(Dismissively)* Ohoho! Simply because somebody exercises authority it doesn't become his father's property, or does it?

DHARMA Bheema, you be silent.

ARJUNA Why, elder brother? What brother Bheema says is true. When you come to think of it, this fellow's father was able to exercise authority over the kngdom because our father won it in the first place. *(With disdain)* Hah!

DHARMA Arjuna, I am ashamed of your words. Look, you talk as if we and they are strangers to each other.

BHEEMA AND ARJUNA *(Together)* We are sorry, elder brother. Forgive us. It is just that one thing led to another...

DURYODHANA *(To Karna)* What does it matter what anyone says? Some people revel in mere verbal pleasure!

KARNA That, too, in order to offer advice to others!

DURYODHANA *(To Karna)* Those who indulge in advice-giving like old fogeys, want to rule a kingdom!

DHARMA *(Trying to restrain his brothers from being provoked by the irony in the words of the other two)* Why only for ruling? For doing everything, there is need for counseling on the basis of truth and dharma.

DURYODHANA *(Countering Dharma)* Well, moral advice has use only in a forest. That is why I am saying, you are not fit for being rulers. If you want, you can go to the forest. Dharma and truth, my foot!

DHARMA *(To Duryodhana)* No matter what you say today, don't forget one thing....

DURYODHANA *(Interrupting and looking at Karna)* 'Don't forget', you say! *(Duryodhana and Karna laugh)*

DHARMA *(Continuing his words)* Truth alone will be victorious! *Satyameva Jayate*

DURYODHANA *(Confronting him)* What did you say? Dharmappa, you too don't forget this. Truth resides in victory.

BHEEMA *(Gnashing his teeth)* You arrogant fellow...

ARJUNA *(Exploding with anger)* You power--intoxicated fool...

DHARMA *(Restraining them, and to Duryodhana)* For one wanting to rule a kingdom, such ideas as you have, are violation of dharma. First and foremost, you must have humility.

DURYODHANA *(Rising and speaking passionately)* No, First of all you need style of authority to be a ruler! After that everyone will fall at your feet! You need a splendid palace to live in, and then all will render respect to you from a distance. For movement, you need a magnificent chariot, and then everyone will make way for you in fear! You need to surround yourself with sycophants to boost your ego! Then others will join in a chorus of praise! This is the way to rule a kingdom. This is the way to retain your power and authority!

Bhishma and Vidura who have so far been reacting suitably to this exchange of verbal fusillades, now simply stare at each other

KARNA Add to these the strength of arms...

BHEEMA *(Suddenly laughing)* Hahaha! We have tested the strength of their arms in their countless failures to kill me! Hahaha!

ARJUNA They are under the illusion that admitting people from all sorts of castes into their fold enhances their strength!

KARNA *(Sensing the personal attack against him)* You, Arjuna, I am warning you, don't talk about my caste!

DURYODHANA *(Calming Karna)* Let them blubber, Karna! Let the kingdom come to us first. I shall offer you a high office. Then your caste will be automatically upgraded.

BHISHMA *(In an elderly tone)* Duryodhana, now stop this childish play!

VIDURA *(To Duryodhana)* What do you mean by saying that the kingdom should come to you? Isn't it already yours?

BHEEMA After all this, after the way he has been talking, there is no question of anointing him with office!

KARNA Who the hell are you to put him in office? He will occupy the throne on the strength of his ability!

BHEEMA *(Fuming with wrath)* Let him sit on it and I shall smash his thighs!

DHARMA *(Rising, to Vidura)* Uncle, we can endure differences between us over office, but when *(Looking at his brothers)* persons close to each other fight for office, I do not want it. *(Looking at Duryodhana)* Let him rule!

ARJUNA *(Rising and bowing to his elder brother)* Elder brother, you have misunderstood us. We are not interested in office. If necessary, we are ready to go out with you. But for a moment, consider the matter. We are the ones the people love and they have faith in us. If now we cower before *adharma,* we shall be guilty of perpetrating injustice!

BHEEMA I am of the same opinion. Why should you get angry with me because I am unable to make my feelings and thoughts clear?

BHISHMA Duryodhana, even now it is not too late to abandon your ideas.

VIDURA Moreover there is a very significant principle underlying Arjuna's words...

DURYODHANA *(Intervening with visible disgust)* Well, well, it was left for our beloved uncle to search out that great principle.

DHARMA Grandpa I can no longer endure their humiliating our elders. We shall eke out our livelihood somehow.

KARNA *(Muttering as if to himself)* If only you had that ability!

ARJUNA What did you say?

BHEEMA *(Restraining him)* Don't mind him, Arjuna. The fellow seems to think that ruling a kingdom is like driving a cart!

ARJUNA *(As if muttering)* When the end nears, even the cart may overturn!

KARNA *(Provoked)* What did you say?

DURYODHANA *(Restraining him)* Leave it alone, Karna. After all it was the lesson his father taught him that ruling a kingdom means to get a bunch of courtesans and make them dance! How can we blame him?

BHEEMA *(Restraining his younger brother)* No, ruling is a blind man's job!

DHARMA *(To Vidura)* You are watching, uncle?

VIDURA *(To Bhishma)* In that case, are you advising Dharmappa to leave, grandpa?

BHISHMA *(After pausing to think)* I think we should divide the authority between the two.

DURYODHANA *(Intervening)* No, no! Never! That's out of the question.

BHISHMA *(As if dinning it into Duryodhana's head)* Boy, remember, they too have the same rights as you!

DURYODHANA If that's so, then let us test it.

VIDURA *(Jolted)* Test? What test do you mean?

KARNA To test who has the right...

DURYODHANA *(Restraining him by a hand gesture)* To rule a kingdom, you need prowess, uncle. You who have been always giving lessons of morality to every one will have to do it to yourself, for a change!

VIDURA *(Unable to guess the context)* What prowess?...?

DURYODHANA *(Stubbornly)* It means those who have greater strength alone are entitled to rule.

VIDURA *(Still in the dark)* But the power mentioned in the sastras...

DURYODHANA *(Interrupting)* Consign your sastras to fire! Talk about practical matters. Listen, dear uncle, in practical terms, the power needed is the power of numbers.

BHISHMA AND VIDURA *(Shocked)* What is it you said?

DURYODHANA It is simple. The power of numbers. More numbers equals more power. You may ask, number of what? The number of those who are your kith and kin. Pooh, love of the people, the trust of the people, the clapping applause of the people! Well, these are useful only to deliver moral speeches to the people and are of no use for ruling the kingdom!

BHEEMA *(Intervening)* You! One blow from me, you will die ten times over! And what strength are you talking about?

DURYODHANA If I die, there will be a hundred more alive!

BHEEMA Them too...

DURYODHANA *(Intervening)* Wait, that's what I am talking about. Once I die you will not be able to administer your blow to any one else...

BHEEMA *(Intervening)* I can't? Who will...?

DURYODHANA *(intervening)* Those you are pleased to call your own don't like you--they are disgusted with you, they fear you. Apart from this, my hundred have been specially trained to take you on...

VIDURA *(Intervening)* What are you saying? I don't understand your words...

DURYODHANA *(Intervening)* If you want to know what I mean, I'll tell you in one word. My party has one hundred in addition to me. But they are just five all put together! That's what I mean--our numerical strength is overwhelming. That is why sovereignty should come to me.

BHISHMA Viduranna, this is a contrary debate. After all, I and you feel ourselves outsiders... We have done our best. The

problem seems insoluble... Let's go *(From now on the stage gets slowly darker and gets fully dark by the time his words end.)* and report our failure to Dhritarashtra. What he thinks... *(Slowly spotlight catches Dhritarashtra)*, let him do. Let them rule if they want, let the other group rule or let them share authority!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Alone in the spotlight, as if become one with Dhritarashtra of the story)* If you ask me, let these fellows go to hell!

SANJAYA *(Still in the dark)* What did you say, Dharteppa?

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if unable to identify him)* Dharteppa! *(He moves, towards the scene of action so far, but finds it dark)* Damn it! *(As he looks towards Sanjaya, light falls on Sanjaya)* Something... *(Laughing like one caught making an error)* Did I say something?

SANJAYA You said, 'If you ask me, let them go to hell!' Well, I am asking you, to whom were you addressing those words? *(Dhritarashtra once again moves to the centre-stage, sees Sanjaya scratching his head. Looks at him, smiling)* At last you managed to recognize the characters in the play!

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if scared)* Let alone recognizing them, I had a suspicion that I had forgotten my own identity!

SANJAYA *(Smiling)*Yes, imagining yourself to be the Dhritarashtra of those days, you cursed Kauravas and Pandavas.

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if polluted)* Tche! Tche! Don't misread me that way. What is my status to say such words to them?

SANJAYA *(As if pained)* What is this, Dharteppa, you made a fool of me. Didn't you? I didn't even see it.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Losing track of the context)* Making fool of you. *(Suddenly)* No, no! What is your fault, after all? It was I who persuaded you to show me the drama. And you showed it. How could you imagine that I may enter into a dialogue with characters in the play?

SANJAYA That is not what I meant, Dharteppa. I shall be happy if through my dramatic presentation you forgot your own

identity. But I was referring to your statement, 'What is my status to say such words to them?' That is why I said so.

DHRITARASHTRA I am myself admitting that those words slipped out of my mouth by mistake!

SANJAYA You are repeating the same thing! When you question your status, then my status as one who shows the play is also questioned Isn't it?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Seeking forgiveness)* Why rake up the old issue even after I have confessed my mistake and wound me in the same spot, Sanjappa?

SANJAYA *(As if enraged, rises and moves towards the right end of the stage, with thudding steps)* Mistake! Mistake! Mistake! *(Addressing Dhritarashtra who is shocked)* Dharteppa, I ask you what is the mistake? Where is the wrong, Dharteppa? If they did not want others to comment on their story, the story writers would not have written in a way so easily comprehensible to others. If I wanted you to keep your mouth shut and say nothing, I would not have shown you the play in the first place. *(Stubbornly)* Dharteppa, Dharteppa, do not demean yourself! You are as good as they! And I who am showing you the play am also as good as they! Don't you see?

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if made a fool of)* If I say I don't understand, you will go on in the same strain giving me a headache! If I say that I understand, you will smash my head itself!

SANJAYA *(Surprised)* Do you think I shall really smash your head if you say that you understand?

DHRITARASHTRA Wouldn't you? If I say that I am the equal of Kauravas and Pandavas, won't you do it? You will say, 'You, Dharteppa, do you consider yourself an equal of Kauravas and Pandavas? They *(Walks to the front edge of the stage, looking above)* Well, they were extraordinary people! As for you, a miserable worm struggling to eke out a livelihood from birth to death.

He stops looking above theatrically

SANJAYA *(Staring at Dhritarashtra for a moment with a smile, he returns to his original place and sits down)* You have learnt correctly how some speak about people like you! *(As Dhritarashtra watches him from where he is standing)* But I am not one of them. You know it, don't you? Let that be. You said that they were extraordinary folk...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Returning to his original spot)* Who am I to say it? Such words are beyond my reach. After hearing somebody saying it...

SANJAYA *(Intervening)* However, you spoke as if you agreed with them. If that is so, tell me what they did further.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Unable to follow)* They? Who are they?

SANJAYA Of course, Kauravas and Pandavas. You have seen them fight over the kingdom. What did they do later?

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if revealing a secret)* Well, I am telling this only to you, Sanjappa. Well, they did what everybody does!

SANJAYA *(Stubbornly)* What does it mean, I am asking you.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Slightly upset because he had to say it)* Good grief! You are bent upon getting it said through my mouth? What did they do? Well, you are watching with your own eyes what our people do. They did the same.

SANJAYA *(Stubborn but smiling)* Yes, but what is that...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening angrily)* What else? A kingdom for everybody.

SANJAYA After that?

DHRITARASHTRA After that? God help them if they carry on like this!

SANJAYA That means?

DHRITARASHTRA That means--their own Indraprasta, their own capital, their own palace. Fortunately, the Pandavas did not

demand their own rivers, hills and forests! Otherwise, the people of today would have demanded them also. They would have said, 'We want a Ganga for ourselves, a Varanasi for ourselves, we want one...' *(Pauses as he sees Sanjaya staring at him)* My dear fellow, why do you stare at me like that?

ANJAYA No, I am just wondering whether you are speaking about the present generation or about Kauravas and Pandavas of the play...

)HRITARASHTRA *(Interrupting)* Past people and present people! They are all the same! It seems God pronounced that He would be reborn in every age. Is hat a great deed? We too are re--born...

SANJAYA *(Intervening, smiling)* Who denies it?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Adamant)* Re–born not in His sense, in different incarnations! Whatever the age, we are re-born in the same incarnation!

SANJAYA How can you say that, Dharteppa? Look here, don't you and I occasionally remember things from our Dwapara? Then are you suggesting we are now as we were then?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Like a stubborn child)* Excepting that we have deteriorated a little...

SANJAYA *(Interrupting)* Deteriorated? That means, you were then blind but now you can see...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* Then I couldn't see but now I do not see! It is all the same! Then my not seeing had a valid reason! I was blind. That is why I said we have deteriorated.

SANJAYA *(Smiling)* But do you say that I too have deteriorated? Even I?

DHRITARASHTRA That is for you to sort out. Why should I...

SANJAYA *(Stubbornly)* No, I insist on your telling me.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Desperate)* What can I say, Sanjappa? Your mind is yours.

SANJAYA In the previous age, that I was your eyes...

DHRITARASHTRA *(As if completing the sentence)* Now you serve as spectacles for those eyes.

SANJAYA *(Surprised at the word)* Spectacles!

DHRITARASHTRA If you prefer, call them glasses. In short, you are the one who shows things in a different colour. *(Rising)* Let's not bother about it! You managed to force me to say all sorts of things. Though I am so old, I still cannot say my own words, merely mouth what others say. *(Smiling)* Then doesn't it mean that I am not responsible for my words? Let's stop this idle chatting and go!

SANJAYA *(Surprised)* 'Go'? Go where, Dharteppa?

DHRITARASHTRA Home. That is what decent folk do when the day is over.

SANJAYA Home? *(Also rising)* Dharteppa, having asked me to show you the play, you now want to leave in the middle. *(Forcing him affectionately to sit down)* Please sit down, sit down, Dharteppa!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Sitting down, smiling)* Sanjappa, you have at last acquired the art of showing the drama to people even if you have to force them to watch it! Yes? Haha!

SANJAYA What else can I do, Dharteppa? Fortunately you are the only person available and I have to hold you down till the end of the play.

DHRITARASHTRA All right, now I have stayed back. If you want to go ahead, do so without delay. What play do you want to present?

SANJAYA *(Surprised)* Bravo! What play? Dharteppa, to refresh your memory is as tricky as to weigh a frog in a balance! By the time I make you remember one thing, you forget the other! You are asking me what play, and that too after the play has begun! Wasn't it you who said that you remembered the previous age and asked me to tell the story? I said, I won't

tell a story but show a play, in a way in which you can recognize it.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Suddenly realising)* Yes, yes, I remember! You had started the play! Somehow from one thing to another, we lost track. Haha! I forgot! Yes,.Proceed. *(He speaks and sits down with his back to the audience...)*

SANJAYA *(Stopping him from doing so)* What is this? What are you doing? What is the idea of sitting with your back to the audience and your face turned away?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Stretching a hand towards the centre of the stage)* Well, the drama takes place there, isn't it so?

SANJAYA Dharteppa, drama takes place everywhere; we should see it where it takes place. Do you think it is children's play to take place at a fixed place? Do you imagine we are all actors working at the theatre receiving our wages from God?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Laughing)* My dear fellow, I shall not say anything more. But tell me clearly and precisely what you have said and what you are saying. Do not push this old man's head into confusion!

SANJAYA All I am saying is just this; open your eyes and see what is happening in front of you. That is where drama is taking place. *(While saying this, he points to the audience. Suddenly the stage goes dark. Completely. In the audience, a woman appears facing Dhritarashtra's eyes. Her hair is loose. Her clothes are torn and tattered. A man is dragging her. She quickly moves away from him and addresses him in a threatening voice...)*

THE WOMAN Beware! Keep away from me! If you dare touch me, you will forfeit your life!

THE MAN *(Moving away a little)* Your very sight is enough to make me feel my life is flying away! And if I were to touch you God knows what will happen! Haha! *(Stretches his hands forward)*

THE WOMAN You wretch! Shameless one!... *(Hits his hands with force but he does not release her)* Take your hands off! Take them

away! *(Lacking energy to resist, in a weak voice)* Leave me alone. I shall go with you.

THE MAN *(Walking her to the stage)* If you come of your own accord, what's going to happen to me? He has asked me to get hold of you and drag you there.

THE WOMAN *(Trying to contain her bursting grief)* Who is the outcaste who asked you to do this?

THE MAN In our kingdom, we recognize no caste or kinship.

THE WOMAN Don't you recognize even the honour of a lady?

THE MAN Why do you ask me? The person who runs the kingdom is Dhuryappa. We are simply there to obey him. Hun! Come along! *(He makes her climb on to the stage). (Now the upper half of the stage is lighted. In the centre is Duryodhana. To his right are Karna, Bhishma, and Vidura, and to his left, Dharma, Bheema and Arjuna. Excepting Duryodhana and Karna, the rest lower their faces with shame. They are all sitting.)*

DURYODHANA *(Staring hard at the Woman)* This woman is our slave!

THE WOMAN *(Looking at ever one)* I do not see any real male here!

DURYODHANA *(Feeling insulted)* What did you say? *(Unable to utter any word or sound further)*

THE WOMAN These fellows who can countenance the scene of a woman being dragged but are unable to do anything about it, are eunuchs! *(Bhima from one side and Bhishma from the other look at her without raising their faces)* These fellows who stare at me without restraint are animals! But, I don't see any men around!

DURYODHANA *(Unable to control his anger)* You, who do you think yourself to be?

KARNA *(In a haughty tone)* Shall I tell you who she is? The Sastra says that a woman must have one husband. But she, in the service of many, is a slave, a *bandhaki*.

BHISHMA Tche ! Tche! No...she...she...she...Tche *(Unable to say anything, lowers his face)*

THE WOMAN I'll tell you who I am. Listen.... *(Addressing Duryodhana)* You think you are running a kingdom! Listen then. You listen to me. I am the masculinity that all men have lost in your Kingdom.

BHEEMA *(Suddenly raising his face)* Bravo!

KARNA Oh! In that case you are deceiving us by wrapping a saree around your body? Haha!

DURYODHANA *(Laughing, to Karna)* Then do you want us to expose her deception and settle the issue?

VIDURA Tche! Tche! Disgusting! Injustice!

THE WOMAN Who is it? Is it Viduranna? Uncle, a naked body was not an object of disgust at birth! But how come it becomes one now? What kind of philosophy is yours?

KARNA *(With anger)* You slave, shut up your mouth! Do you have the impudence to counter--argue? Who do you think we are? We are the ones running this kingdom!

THE WOMAN No. You are merely the wicked ones who think they can do anything simply because they have authority on their side!

THE MAN No. What is happening is a cultural event for the edification of citizens like us! This is no show of the mis-chief of power.

THE WOMAN *(Mimicking his voice)* I see. You have even culture in your kingdom?

THE MAN We may not say it is there but we can say definitely it has survived!

THE WOMAN To stake women in gamble; to humiliate them when they venture out; to think that since men and women are equal, the women too share man's licentiousness... *(Addressing Dharma)* Does this culture meet your approval?

DHARMA Since I am at a loss to know how to address you now, I...

THE WOMAN *(Interrupting)* At least you could give me the credit of being a woman?

DURYODHANA *(Interrupting)* None of that, you are a slave, our slave.

THE WOMAN *(Pointing at Bhishma and Vidura)* There they are, your true slaves. They are bereft of manliness and you can call them slaves. *(Bhishma turns pale as he looks at her)* Why do you look at me, as one caught making a mistake? Since how long have you been appointed here to act as advisor to the rulers of this kingdom? *(As Vidura looks at her)* You too? What is your return for the wages and privileges enjoyed as advisor? Yes, all you do is to suppress your independent thoughts and dance to their tune! You are all betrayers, all corruption-mongers!

DURYODHANA *(To the Man)* You! What are you waiting for? How arrogant she is! Pull out her clothes, disrobe her right now...

BHEEMA *(Rising)* You shameless wretch...

ARJUNA *(closing his tightly)* Your tongue. First I shall...

KARNA *(Clenching his teeth)* You puppies crawling at our feet...

BHISHMA Shame! What is this?... Stop it...

BHEEMA Grandpa, how long are we to put up with this?

KARNA *(Pointing at Dharma)* Look how this fellow has locked his mouth. This great expert in advising others! *(To the Man)* What are you waiting for?

DURYODHANA *(To the Man)* What did I order you?

THE WOMAN *(Preventing the Man coming forward with diffidence)* Wait! *(To Duryodhana)* When the bodies of countless women in your kingdom lack the protection of clothes to preserve their honour, I feel myself ashamed to wear them and go about.

These clothes, the clothes that I wear are the mighty weapon guarding the honour of all women in this kingdom, beware. Once you know, this, it does not matter who pulls it away.

BHISHMA *(Intervening)* Stop, sister, your words put me to shame.

THE WOMAN But I shall speak without shame.

VIDURA That we are helpless to do anything...

THE WOMAN *(Intervening)* I know it only too well. That is why I am not appealing to you. Wasn't it possible for you to tell them that there was no need to grab by deceit palaces others and enjoy their pleasures and privileges?

BHISHMA It was possible, but we didn't have... the mind to do so.

THE WOMAN That is why I call you corrupt. All of you, every one of you, who prostitute your independent judgement and slave for others for personal gain, you are all corruption--mongers.

VIDURA Tche! Such monstrous injustice must be prevented!

BHISHMA If we cannot do it, let's tell Dhritarashtra to put an end to it. *(As they say, 'must tell', 'must prevent', the stage grows dark. They rise. A moment later, spotlight catches Dhritarashtra and Sanjaya. They are now sitting with their backs to the audience. Slowly they turn their faces towards the audience. Dhritarashtra's eyes are closed and Sanjaya watches him.)*

SANJAYA Why, Dhritarashtra, did the play put you to sleep? *(Dhritarashtra moves to a side without a word)* Good heavens! What is this? Where are you off to?

DHRITARASHTRA *(After walking some four steps or so, stops and turns back towards Sanjaya)* I was just trying to see whether I could walk! *(Smiling at Sanjaya who is shocked)* I was damn scared after remembering all sorts of things, wandering in all sorts of places, and feeling that I was thousands of years old *(Then taking another step)* Well, I can still walk, on my own feet!

SANJAYA *(Shocked)* Now what made you think like this? It was because you wanted me to tell you the old story, I made a drama out of it...

DHRITARASHTRA But I didn't see your play.

SANJAYA *(Disbelieving)* What? Never saw it? *(He stands up)*

DHRITARASHTRA *(Nodding his head)* No. You showed that woman in your play. Well, seeing her put other ideas in my head. Caught in those ideas, my mind began to wander away to all sorts of places. As a result I lost sight of your play!

SANJAYA *(Moving forward)* What are those ideas?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Without saying a word, moves to the edge of the stage and sitting down)* What ideas are you talking about? No matter how many births come and go, how many ages pass, a woman's nature, her conduct, has not changed!

SANJAYA *(Walking towards him, smiling)* Why should grandpa get ideas about a woman's ankle--bells? Yes?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Sitting down raising his face to look at Sanjaya)* Sanjappa, I am afraid you have not understood me. When one is of an age devoid of sense and judgement, a woman becomes the most desirable object in the world, totally irresistible! Once you acquire maturity and judgement, you will realize that God has created woman to halt the progress of mankind.

SANJAYA *(Sitting down)* Progress... towards where?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Confused)* What damned place who knows! If I knew it, wouldn't I too have become I great man?

SANJAYA Progress... progress in what?...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* You are asking the same thing. But I can say I know this much. Thanks to women, we are born and grow up. After growing up we get hitched to another woman. After that repent for what we have done and die! This.... This has been going on from time immemorial!

SANJAYA Oho! Dharteppa is now poking his nose into philosophy!

DHRITARASHTRA Damn philosophy! What philosophy of mine is there in this? When one reaches adulthood he gets pulled by someone. Overwhelmed by the pull, he gets stuck with a woman. What is there in it we can call our discovery? How many men have done this in how many births, how many ages! They have all attained the same knowledge. Times have changed but this knowledge hasn't. Knowledge hasn't grown.

SANJAYA All right, I get you. But what do you think you and I should do about it?

DHRITARASHTRA Nothing can be done. That's what I am driving at.

SANJAYA But... look here...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening, without letting him have his say)* I say that we should at least learn not to do what should not be done.

SANJAYA *(Surprised)* What shouldn't be done? What is it? How is it?

DHRITARASHTRA *(After breathing deeply and after a moment's silence)* Didn't I say that a woman's nature and behaviour haven't changed? Look, Sanjappa, the male is like a wild boar in the forest. He roams where he wills, eats when hungry, and sleeps when sleepy! He doesn't bother about himself or others. But a woman is not like that. She is obsessed with herself, what is hers, happiness and sorrow and things like that! When she is happy she takes delight in parading her happiness before less happy people and ignites their jealousy; if she is unhappy, she curses those who are happy day and night. What do you say, am I right or wrong?

SANJAYA *(Nods his head skeptically and reluctantly in approval, without saying anything)*

DHRITARASHTRA What does it matter if I and you say yes or no? The wheel revolves of its own accord. Look at our

boys! They are dying without jobs. Why? Do you think there is no work to be done? But they are not interested in that work. And when I say, they, I mean actually their wives ! All right, when they accept, an inconsequential job, unable to resist their wives' harassment, they indulge in taking bribes. But losing courage at having taken bribes, they take their own lives! What do you think the wives who enjoy do? Yes?

SANJAYA *(Smiling)* Why ask me? I am neither a woman nor do I have a wife!

DHRITARASHTRA That is exactly why I am asking you. True, you have no wife. But some woman, seeing you happy without a wife, feels jealous and then casts her net to catch you! That starts the Kurukshetra battle between you and her husband. That is what I am saying--no matter what the age, every age has its Kurukshetra! Flaunting authority, reveling in wealth, snatching away from others their wealth.

SANJAYA *(Anxious to end the discussion)* That is all right, grandpa; but someone should exercise authority? Otherwise, as they say, the big fish eat the small fish; that would be the fate of people like you and me!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Looking at him with pity)* What a mad fellow you are! Because God creates the world, can we humans too presume to be creators? You know what happens if we do. Viswamitra created mere snakes and scorpions! Our people today create atom bomb and poison gas! You need qualification to exercise authority, don't you agree?

SANJAYA If I say yes, Kauravas will thrash me, but if I say no, Pandavas will do that!

DHRITARASHTRA That is why I told my boy... *(Closes his eyes)*

SANJANA *(Surprised)* Whom?

DHRITARASHTRA *(In a meditative trance)* Look here, boy, I taught you along with them, didn't I? Well, they became like that and you are like this! Authority is needed to do good to

others, not for snatching from others what belongs to them. *(Light dims slowly)*

SANJAYA *(Uncomprehendingly)* I can't make out. To whom? For what purpose? *(Light dims further)*

DHRITARASHTRA *(Sighing)* He didn't heed me and carried on like that! What a situation resulted! *(Complete darkness)* He became a laughing--stock for the very people before whom he wanted to parade his glory!

Accompanying these words, there is loud laughter. Gradually the stage of the play-within-play is lighted. In that light Bheema is seen laughing. He tries to contain his laughter but fails. Tired

BHEEMA Brother! Haha! Brother...... you heard, hahaha!....

DHARMA *(Enters, sees Bheema, and smiling)* What happened, Bheema? What is this? Why are you laughing like this?

BHEEMA *(Controlling the laughter)* If you heard the story, you too... Haha!... You too will laugh... Haha!

DHARMA *(Laughing unavoidably)* Whose story?

ARJUNA *(Entering)* What story? *(Looking at Bheema)* What is this? *(To Dharma)* Brother. Why is Bheemanna laughing like this?

DHARMA At some story it seems. I also do not know. I am waiting for him to stop laughing and tell us.

ARJUNA *(In a weary tone)* Our daily job has been reduced to nothing more than sitting down to tell stories! We can wait for any length of time! What other business do we have anyway?

DHARMA *(In an elderly, affectionate voice)* Why? Why do you say we lack work? *(Bheema bursts into a guffaw again)*

ARJUNA *(Looking at Bheema angrily)* It is clear. You have been boasting about the power of your arms. Now that power is useful only for beating our bellies!

DHARMA Even so, he beats his belly with laughter. Unlike you...

BHEEMA *(Controlling his laughter with effort)* Look here, Arjuna, my child! Don't be angry that I am laughing. If only you knew why I am laughing *(Bursts into laughter again but he tries to control it, and wiping his eyes)*... you... should you know it, your anger will vanish suddenly.

DHARMA *(Intervening)* In that case, sooner you tell us the better.

BHEEMA *(To Arjuna)* Whom are you angry with?

ARJUNA *(Intervening, thumping the ground with his feet)* 'with whom', 'with whom'! Who snatched away authority from our hands and reduced us to jobless idleness...

DHARMA *(Surprised)* Jobless!

ARJUNA *(Angrily)* What else? Do you consider whiling away time by listening to stories a serious occupation?

DHARMA *(Sounding a little pained)* Arjuna, then, you think that the only real job is to exercise authority.

ARJUNA *(Stubbornly)* Well, for people like us, that is the real occupation.

DHARMA Oh! In that case, why shouldn't others entertain similar views about themselves?

ARJUNA But if one desires to rule a kingdom, one must possess the necessary qualification and worth.

DHARMA That is your idea.

ARJUNA What do you mean?

BHEEMA *(To Dharma)* Brother, that is my idea too.

DHARMA *(Looking at both)* That means, then, that you have incarnated only to rule a kingdom.

ARJUNA *(Refusing defeat with a childish stubbornness)* No, brother, don't interpret our words any way you want. You too know it... If a person brought up in poverty has a sudden windfall, he is certainly bound to misuse that wealth. If a stupid person acquires authority, he is bound to misuse it. That is certain.

DHARMA *(With the condescending smile of an elder)* That means, the poor should never come into wealth and a stupid person should never get authority. They should go through births...

BHEEMA *(Intervening)* Brother, your words send my head whirling and they throw not even a ray of light. However, I can prove with example that Arjuna has spoken the truth... *(Arjuna looks at Bheema in wonder)*

DHARMA *(Showing surprise)* Proof?

BHEEMA Yes. Proof. Yes, proof of what happens if the unworthy exercise authority. That is the story I want to tell...

ARJUNA *(Contemptuously)* Oh! Story! *(Then sighs disappointed)*

DHARMA *(Losing the context)* Wanted to tell? What and when?

BHEEMA Now, here. Don't you remember you wanted to know that story? Why I was laughing?

DHARMA *(Catching on)* Yes.... Do you want to tell us about it?

ARJUNA *(Muttering)* Nothing but roaming the forests and telling stories! I am damn tired listening endlessly to this forest epic!

BHEEMA *(Stubbornly)* It is not just any story. It is, in fact, your Dhuryappa's story !

DHARMA *(Taken back)* Whose story did you say?

ARJUNA *(Hopefully)* Who.... Duryodhana's?

DHARMA *(Anxiously)* What happened to him? Where is he?

BHEEMA In the company of cowherds!

DHARMA *(Uncomprehending and hence scared)* What did you say?

BHEEMA They tied him up with rope and dragged him away like cattle!

ARJUNA While being dragged, wasn't he moving on all fours, as befitting his previous and next births!

DHARMA *(With the authority of seniority)* Eh, what sort of talk are you indulging in? Have you any sense of responsibility? *(To Bheema)* You seem to have no shame and self--pride!

BHEEMA *(In a conciliatory tone)* Brother, please have a little patience.

DHARMA *(Nodding his head to indicate he can't do it)* What exactly happened....? Is Duryodhana in any sort of danger....?

BHEEMA *(Interrupting)* No, nothing serious. Wait, I am telling you about it... *(In a hurry)* Coming *(Soon after saying this, he exits)*

DHARMA Tche! My brothers should turn ungrateful like this...

ARJUNA *(Intervening)* What great disaster has occurred, brother.

DHARMA What else? Something has happened to Duryodhana and you are not planning to help him, you are simply laughing. What betrayal of brotherly duty...

ARJUNA *(Intervening)* Brother, don't you simply blame us with such harsh words. Nothing has happened to any of our brothers here!

DHARMA *(Shocked, staring at him)* What did you say? Duryodhana is not our brother?

ARJUNA *(Contemptuously)* What kind of brother? A brother who caused our palace to be burnt, who snatched away our kingdom through deception...!

Bheema enters, saying 'Forget all that'. He carries on his shoulder a somewhat heavy, attractively shaped stone slab. The other two stare at him, surprised, their mouths half-open. Soon after entering he places the slab at the centre of the stage and then pretends to wipe it clean.....

BHEEMA *(To Dharma)* Well, it's a long story, brother. First sit on this. *(To Arjuna)* Brother, I said, forget all that.

DHARMA *(In a hard authoritative voice)* What is this prank you are playing, Bheema? When I have been asking you anxiously about Duryodhana's plight , you have brought this boulder...

BHEEMA *(Joining palms, intervening)* Duryodhana is physically safe. But since the blows have been struck at the right place, it is

impossible for him to sit on the throne and rule. Therefore, you should practise from now how to sit... *(Arjuna bursts into loud laughter)*

DHARMA *(Forced to laugh)* Since you are determined to tell it in your own unique style there is no use in my hurrying you.

BHEEMA On one side, poets, and on the other, fools. One, they blurt out what comes to their mind, and two, they never say it with brevity!

ARJUNA *(Laughing)* Then poet Bheema, begin your recital.

BHEEMA All right. *(Squatting on the ground, left to Dharma, asks Arjuna to sit opposite.)* Where do I begin?

DHARMA *(To Bheema)* Anywhere. But please begin the story.

BHEEMA *(In a story-teller's style)* Here, a little distance from here, there is a place called Gandharva Hatti, do you know it?

ARJUNA Yes, I know it. There is a person named Chitrasenappa there.

BHEEMA *(To Dharma)* He has a big estate, lot of cattle, everything on a large scale. Well? Wouldn't our Dhuryappa be tempted? He had his eye on that wealth.

ARJUNA Damn him! A greedy vulture!

DHARMA But he has no authority over it?

BHEEMA *(Mimicking Duryodhana)* 'No authority? Oh ho! Who is saying it? All authority in the kingdom is in our hands. This means we have authority over everybody and everything.'

DHARMA Tche! This is gross injustice!

ARJUNA It is arrogance of authority!

BHEEMA Greed is a bottomless well. But now? How well was he caught there! Haha!

ARJUNA *(Enthusiastically)* Chitrasenappa beat him black and blue, and dragged him away. Right?

DHARMA *(To Bheema)* Is it true? *(Bheema nods his head enthused)* Tche! What is this childishness of yours? First, hurry to get him freed and save him.

BHEEMA *(Shocked)* To get released whom?

ARJUNA *(Defiant)* Do you want that household--breaking fellow to be saved?

DHARMA When all is said and done, Duryodhana is, after all, one of ours... *(Light dims)*

BHEEMA If we remember for a moment the things he has done to us...

ARJUNA When we see the way he misuses his authority... *(Light dims further)*

DHARMA *(Leaving hurriedly but pausing to look back at the two)* No matter what he does, he is one of ours! Understand?

Dharma exits. The two brothers, nonplussed, follow the elder brother, as the stage becomes totally dark. In a moment, spotlight catches Dhritarashtra and Sanjaya. Dhritarashtra opens his eyes as if waking up

DHRITARASHTRA Bravo! Bravo!

SANJAYA *(Surprised)* Bravo for whom, Dharteppa?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Closing his eyes, with joined palms)* For that great soul! That Dharmappa!

SANJAYA *(After staring at him for a moment)* Dharteppa, tell me on oath, if you really intended the bravo for Dharmappa? Or was it merely to join others who applaud him and clap with them?

DHRITARASHTRA Sanjappa, you have a very suspicious nature! I say bravo to your play, can't you be simply happy?

SANJAYA *(As if probing a secret)* Didn't I say it? You think differently.

DHRITARASHTRA Damn, I am watching the drama before me. Why do you worry about what is in my mind?

SANJAYA *(Decisively)* No. I insist on your telling me.

DHRITARASHTRA Tell what?

SANJAYA Your real feelings...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* Boy, how can you help your fate? When one wants to pat on the back of a person, he shouldn't worry which side of the back the mole is on! Listen, I am telling you, what I really felt. To tell you the truth from the bottom of my heart, this time too I did not watch your play at all!

SANJAYA *(With wounded feeling)* What? What did you say? Didn't you see the play at all?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Stubbornly)* No! No! No! Don't ask me why. Even for that, your smartness is the reason. If I had been left to myself I could have seen the play. But our Sanjappa is no ordinary playwright. *(With extreme irony)* Tche! Tche! No, never! His play is what happens everywhere! You can watch it sitting where you are! Telling me a bit here and a bit there, in the end, where did you run your play, boy? *(pointing to the stage within the stage)* There! I said to myself why is this fellow so stubborn? I am also stubborn. I too didn't turn my face to watch; I am an eighty year old man. All sorts of drama take place behind my back. Don't I know that I shouldn't see them? That is why I sat turning away my face so that I couldn't even see the shadows of your play! Are you satisfied after knowing my mind?

SANJAYA *(With a smiling face)* Now I feel satisfied, Dharteppa.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Wondering)* What did you say? Did you catch what I said? Did you understand it? Even then, are you saying you were satisfied?

SANJAYA Why not, Dharteppa? I wanted to know how a person like you sees a play. Now I know.

DHRITARASHTRA Well, I sat with my face turned away because you asked me to. Don't forget it! Left to myself...

SANJAYA You would have watched the play directly with your own eyes. I said this is what I understood.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Surprised)* What do you mean, 'That is what I understood'? Do you now realize that people see drama with their eyes?

SANJAYA I knew, of course, that people see a play with their eyes. But if you see it only with eyes, you will not see it fully. People do not know this. This is what I have learnt now!

DHRITARASHTRA What is all this? Your words increase in quantity but their meaning gets diminished!

SANJAYA I say when the play takes place before you, you should close your eyes!

DHRITARASHTRA In that case, why should we keep our ears open?

SANJAYA The ears don't come in the way of your understanding... Wait, let me complete what I want to say. If anything appeals to his eyes, a person accepts it instantaneously! He does not go beyond it to understand what he sees. Well, that is why I advise you to close your eyes when the play takes place... The brain does not work until you shut your eyes.

DHRITARASHTRA Well, well, when you close your eyes the head does its usual work which is to nod you to sleep!

SANJAYA Dharteppa, that's why I am against make-up and costumes. If they are there, the eyes are happy. Mind is satisfied easily. No other thought will enter it.

DHRITARASHTRA Sanjappa, you and your play! Who wants to worry one's head with other thoughts?

SANJAYA You have thought, Dharteppa! That is why I want to know what is in your mind...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* Mind... Mind... Mind! Who can decipher it? And how?

SANJAYA Dharteppa, I can draw out what is in your mind!

DHRITARASHTRA What are you saying?

SANJAYA *(Stands up opposite to Dhritarashtra)* Look here, close your eyes, close them! *(Mesmerised by Sanjaya's words, Dhritarashtra, with eyes closed, follows in his footsteps so that he is in the centre of the stage. Sanjaya is to his left)* You Dhritarashtra and your sons have driven the Pandavas to exile in the forest. When they are in exile, Duryodhana who goes to make fun of them, finds himself captured by a Gandharva... Out of compassion, the Pandavas rescue him. Don't you remember? King Dhritarashtra, then the Pandavas....

DHRITARASHTRA *(Closing his eye and in a charged tone)* Don't you talk to me about those Pandavas, Oh Sanjaya! Sometimes I used to fondly hope that they would have the guts to halt my son's deceit and injustice *(Suddenly like blind Dhritarashtra, worn out by age, walks haltingly, returns to his old position on the stage)* But you know, the goodness of good people turns into a thorn for others! Sanjaya, do you know what happened then?...

SANJAYA *(Feeling in himself the emotional intensity of the play-within-play)* Yudhishtara says:

Paraih paribhave prapte, vayam pancottaram satam
Paraspara virodhetu vayam pancaiva te sataha

DHRITARASHTRA *(Unmindful and continuing his words)* Do you know what happened? He supported my son, saying that against outsiders we and the Pandavas are one! This is a new style of ruling a kingdom. For the love of their party, to lose one's honour. To support their side even if it is wrong...

SANJAYA *(The emotion drained away)* Dharteppa...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Still emotional)* Do you know what this son of mine does? *(Sitting in his old spot)* What does he do, do you think? *(Sanjaya also sits down)* Haha! *(Cruel laughter)* He saw to it that all wells in the forest were closed. These stupid Pandavas wander in the same forest, desperate for drinking water. Poor fellows! Dharma sends his brothers one by one

to fetch water. *(Light dims)* Their brother had asked them and they too were thirsty. They went but didn't return! Poor Dharma could not even shout his brothers' names because his mouth had gone dry and parched. He began to move, in search of his brothers. He came upon a pond in the forest. He rushed to quench his thirst. The water was limpid, crystal clear, and he could see at the bottom the dead bodies of his four brothers who had drowned! He looked this way and that like a mad man. He thought he heard someone laughing, Hah! Hahaha!...

Along with this laughter is heard another laughter in a grave tone. Light falls on the upper edge of the stage. Dharma who bends to scoop the water is baffled. Where he sits, he looks round with a face that is tired, dried up, and scared. The laughter is heard but there is none near by. Suddenly the laughter stops followed by a voice

THE VOICE Dharmaraja...!

DHARMA Who is it?

THE VOICE I'll tell you later who I am, but, Dharmaraja....

DHARMA I am not Raja.

THE VOICE What did you say?

DHARMA I am merely a humble servant of the people.

THE VOICE *(Laughing)* Oho! Hasn't the age changed now?

DHARMA Yes. This is the age of Kali. But who are you?

THE VOICE As far as you are concerned, consider me as just a voice.

DHARMA But whose voice? If you are the voice of the people I shall respect you.

THE VOICE *(Protesting against the disrespect)* Respect? Respect for me? Do I need the respect and recognition from a mere mortal, I who am a Yaksha?

DHARMA Well, then, be efficient in your job as a Yaksha. What is this dharma of yours that prevents the thirsty from drinking the water?

THE VOICE You will be entitled to drink the water only if you can answer my questions. Your brothers didn't listen and hence the water itself drank them!

DHARMA But if I first drink water I shall get the strength to answer your questions, therefore first let me... *(As he bends to the water, suddenly his back is straightened and stiffened through some external force, and he looks back)* What is this? Someone is pushing me from behind... *(The Voice laughs)*

THE VOICE Nobody is here to push you. Your past deeds are pushing you. You misunderstood me and that's why this happened to you.

DHARMA *(Shocked)* Misunderstood you? But I don't know who you are. You did not appear to my eyes....

THE VOICE I am a spirit. I cannot be seen by the eyes.

DHARMA *(Smiling)* Then ask your questions. Since I happen to be a king of spirits I can easily answer your questions. Come on, ask me! Ask me! My throat is drying up.

THE VOICE But now you are in a desperate hurry to drink water. You are not interested in answering my questions. Yet you have agreed to answer. What do they call this behaviour in the age of Kali? This then is my first question.

DHARMA You Spirit, doing harmful things for self–benefit is called the supreme moral principle able of bribe–taking, corruption! Can I drink water, now at least, please?

THE VOICE *(Laughing)* Haha! Do you think you can win me as easily as this? If my soul is to attain peace, you have to answer a few more questions.

DHARMA *(Entreating)* Look, I am not saying that you shouldn't ask your questions. I am not saying that I will not answer them. To gain your confidence and trust I have answered one question. You first ask all your questions as I drink water. I shall answer them afterwards....

THE VOICE *(Determined)* No. That is not possible!

DHARMA *(Disappointed)* Ask, then *(He turns his back to the pond, facing the direction from which the Voice came, as if talking to himself)* For one like me who has ruled a kingdom, this is the first time that I have been humiliated by being asked questions without prior notice and warning!

THE VOICE *(Doubtfully)* What did you say?

DHARMA *(Adamant)* Nothing. Ask your questions quickly.

THE VOICE My second question. When I was alive, everyone called me a thief, a greedy fellow, unworthy of trust. Yet they said they would be saved by me. What principle is involved in my being called a saviour though I have been a thief, a greedy fellow and an unworthy character?

DHARMA Well, listen to me, you Spirit; in the age of Kali, the power of making an unworthy fellow worthy, comparable to the grace of the powerful and influential, is called the Law of Influence *(Beggingly)* Now at least, please, let me.

THE VOICE *(Ignoring his request)* Though apparently opposed to each other the bribe--taking principle and illegally influencing principle, (a) Are they related? (b) If yes, what is the nature of this relationship?

DHARMA (a) Yes. (b) It is the relationship between a husband and wife

THE VOICE What relationship, did you say?

DHARMA It means as secretive and private as the relationship between a married couple! Can't be made public! *(Sighing)* Ush! No further words may now come out of my throat.

THE VOICE In that case, I shall put you brief questions and all you have to do is to answer them briefly.

DHARMA Yes.

THE VOICE By the giving up of what can we attain a better state?

DHARMA Shame.

THE VOICE What should be given up if no harm is to result?

DHARMA Truth.

THE VOICE What should one give up to acquire wealth?

DHARMA Integrity and honesty.

THE VOICE What is the nature of penance?

DHARMA Doing anything to keep intact your position of power.

THE VOICE What is self--control?

DHARMA To thrash those soundly who dare to criticize us.

THE VOICE What is forgiveness?

DHARMA To protect one's folk no matter what they do.

THE VOICE What is called shame?

DHARMA The act of others opposing us.

THE VOICE Among compassions and moral principles, what is the best?

DHARMA Make verbal promise of contributions to public funds

THE VOICE What is simplicity?

DHARMA To speak to suit those sitting before you.

THE VOICE Who is man's worst enemy?

DHARMA Another man.

THE VOICE What is the worst among diseases?

DHARMA To point out a mistake.

THE VOICE Who is a good man?

DHARMA One who can do nothing.

THE VOICE Who is a bad man?

DHARMA One who insists on doing good deeds.

THE VOICE What is the best bath?

DHARMA The bath of sweat on another's naked body.

THE VOICE What is the best gift?

DHARMA To keep warm the hand that gives.

THE VOICE Last question. If you answer it, your brothers will be back to life and you will get water. What is the most wonderful thing in the world?*

DHARMA The most wonderful thing is that still men trust each other.

THE VOICE Bravo! Dharma, you have given me the answers befitting the age of Kali. Here, now scoop the water.

DHARMA *(Doing so, with wonder)* What is this? The water is cold like ice.

THE VOICE *(Suddenly laughing)* Haha! Like ice... cold as ice ! Haha! To see that people like you feel it I had earlier packed it with slabs of ice. The pond has no spring of water! Haha! Haha!

The stage becomes dark as the laughter and the sound of Dharma drinking increase in pace. As darkness invades, the laughter recedes into distance. Light shows Dhritarashtra and Sanjaya. Dhritarashtra is found laughing as in the earlier scene. He looks like a picture of the struggle between tiredness and excitement of laughing. Sanjaya watches him with some fear. Dhritarashtra stands at the centre of the inner stage while Sanjaya stands to his left

DHRITARASHTRA *(Though totally exhausted)* Haha! Water clear like a mirror!. Haha! But it is not water at all ! Haha! Digging a waterless pond... Haha! *(Suddenly stopping, sighing, wiping his eyes, looking around, spotting Sanjaya)* Sanjappa, are you employing sorcery? Why is this happening to me? Ush! *(Suddenly enraged)* Damn you! This wretched play of yours drives me mad!

SANJAYA *(Guiltily, swallowing spit)* Dharteppa, this play went out of my control!

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* All the questions asked by the Voice are there in the original text of the Mahabharata, but only Dharma's answers are trimmed to suit the time and place of the play.

DHRITARASHTRA Then? What am I saying? You made me mad but soon the madness will possess you too.

SANJAYA No, that's not what I meant. I said it has gone beyond my control.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Shocked and a little angry)* 'Your control', what does it mean? Are you suggesting that now it is a play in God's control?

SANJAYA *(Nodding his head)* No. Now it's in your hands, in your control!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Staring at him)* You said, 'soon', but madness has already possessed you, has it? In my hands, my foot!

SANJAYA *(Slowly walking him back to his old spot)* In the beginning, I couldn't make out anything. But when you told the story of the pond, then;....

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* What pond? What are you talking about?

SANJAYA About what you said. They got the pond dug and built, and that it was waterless....?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Stands up and laughs loudly)* Good heavens, my dear fellow! You have truly gone mad! Look here, you know the story of that pond? Why shouldn't I tell you about it? Why shouldn't I tell you the story of how that fellow Mayappa who estimated its expenditure at Rs. 30,000, actually spent Rs. 50,000, got it filled with water carried to it by coolies two days earlier and hoodwinked us into believing that the pond had ground water?

SANJAYA *(Surprised)* Did you tell me that story earlier, Dharteppa?

DHRITARASHTRA What other story do you think I was telling? *(Coming forward slowly)* I scolded my boys about the way they were ruling their kingdom. So many lakhs were spent here and the other thing was built by spending crores! If you really inspect, the structures will not be strong enough to stand even for a few days! I advised them countless times to smoke

out these cheats like Mayappa! Do you know what my boys say? They say, 'Let it be, father!' They must have slipped up somewhere, but he is a good man, Mayappa! You know he has paid Rs. 65,000 to our party fund?

SANJAYA *(Still unbelieving)* Yes?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Surprised)* Yes! That is all you can say? Then it means you fellows are accustomed to this kind of thing and finally come to accept it!

SANJAYA *(With a smiling face)* I did not say 'yes' in that sense, Dharteppa ! Now the knot has got unravelled. That's why I said, 'yes'.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Dissatisfied)* But what knot?

SANJAYA Didn't I say that my play has gone into your hands...?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Sitting where he was sitting earlier)* Enough of your wretched play! I don't know why I asked you for it! When you come to think of it, all I asked of you was just a story! You said smartly that you wanted to show it as drama! If you had merely told a story I would have comfortably been drowsy sitting! But you want everything to be converted into drama!

SANJANA How can you speak like this Dharteppa?

DHRITARASHTRA But how do you want me to speak? Have you not seen it yourself? I don't want to see the play but you insist on showing it.

SANJAYA *(Surprised)* What is this, Dharteppa? Should you say this? But in these days, if you want to earn religious merit, you have to see drama. It is like listening to the religious narratives in the old days...

DHRITARASHTRA *(With sudden laughter)* That's the only pure statement you have made so far ! Haha!

SANJAYA *(Uncomprehending)* What statement?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Laughing at his own humour)* Haha! Today's play is like yesterday's religious narration! Haha! In those days there

were narratives of the greatness of kings and, now stories of the greatness of current rulers! Hah! A good way to earn spiritual merit! haha!

SANJAYA *(Still in the dark)* Why, Dharteppa, what did you find so funny?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Controlling his laughter)* Look here, the boys issue proclamations,you remove the screen to show the play. What kind of play? Play showing the labour of people like our Mayappa? In your play you show the pond is full by just scooping a potful of water. The audience applaud clapping and laugh...

SANJAYA *(With self-pride)* Why shouldn't the people clap in applause? It is a developmental....

DHRITARASHTRA *(In a scolding tone)* Wait, you madcap ! I said that they not only 'clapped' but also 'laughed'. It is the laughing that is crucial. Do you know why? The spectators know that the beauty of Shrpanakha in the religious narratives and the water--filled pond in your play are equally illusory, not true! That's why they laugh. However, those who are too timid to laugh there, burst into peals of laughter as soon as they reach home! *(At this point, Sanjaya, struck by some thought, must appear to be deciding his position, by the time Dhritarashtra's words finish. As he stares at the latter)* What spiritual merit can they gain by watching such stuff? Perhaps you might gain it for yourself. *(Sanjaya slowly rises and moves back, watching Dhritarashtra with curious eyes)* For writing that play I mean in the form of a hundred rupees or so...

SANJAYA *(with a dramatic gesture of hand)* Wait! Wait! Wait! Please Dhritarashtra, wait! *(As Dhritarashtra looks at him dumbfounded)* Please don't look at me like that, I am not mad. Didn't I tell you that the play went out of my control? Now listen to what I am telling you. While I was absorbed in showing the play to you, you, instead of watching it, entered it and snatching the play from me you are carrying it on in your own way! Until now I was unable to see through your trick! While I was showing one thing, you were showing another.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening, surprised)* I? Another thing? Sanjappa, you seem to have forgotten what you said at the start, that I represented the present citizens who are blind despite their eyes! They said I must learn to read, and I did. But didn't you know that I could write as well?

SANJAYA That's why you intervened rising now and then, and showed it by staging your play.

DHRITARASHTRA Look here, Sanjappa, if this eighty--year old fellow could do that you must have done something to him, otherwise how could he do it?

SANJAYA *(Guilty)* Well, that is what I am saying too. While I was trying to do one thing, something else happened and the play went out of my control!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Irritated)* Good heavens, you are repeating the same thing--'the play went out of my control, out of my control'!

SANJAYA *(Explaining)* See, Dharteppa, trying to grasp what was inside your mind, I handed over the play itself to you!

DHRITARASHTRA Into my hands? Well, you don't ask about my mind now but about my hands. Don't you?

SANJAYA *(Siging)* Never mind, at least now I know what is inside your mind. That's consoling!

DHRITARASHTRA (Scared) Understood what was inside my mind? *(Sanjaya nods affirmatively)* When did you understand it? That is... completely... Everything inside my mind...?

SANJAYA *(Laughing)* Have no fear, Dharteppa, I shall not divulge it to others.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Pretending to laugh)* 'Not divulging to others'! Haha! As if my mind is stuffed with evil ideas! Haha! Fear not, he says! Haha! Understood what is inside! Do you think you have cast a magical spell on me?

SANJAYA *(Nodding)* Yes, Dharteppa, I cast a magical spell. Therein lies the power of drama. Didn't I ask you to close your

eyes? No sooner did you close your eyes than I transported you to the Dwapara age! *(Suddenly remembering, in a mock-dramatic style)* Haha! 'Don't talk to me about those Pandavas, Oh Sanjaya'! Haha! And he adds that they are extraordinary people! Haha!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Suspiciously)* Whom are you talking about Sanjappa?

SANJAYA *(Smilingly)* About you. Who else? Haha! 'The goodness of good people becomes a thorn to others'! Haha! *(Laughing, moves to the end of the stage opposite to Dhritarashtra)*

DHRITARASHTRA *(Staring at him with scared eyes)* Sanjappa, come here, here *(As Sanjaya smilingly stays put, he moves closer to Sanjaya)* Come here, come, I shall tell you. *(Placing a hand on Sanjaya's shoulder)* You see, in four situations a person will do anything impulsively_when hungry, when needing a woman, when blinded by anger, when burning with fever... Your so_called magic, I am not sure what it is.

SANJAYA *(Intervening)* Making one forget the present and jolting one back into a former consciousness.

DHRITARASHTRA Well, if you want to jolt me out of the present, at least jolt me into the future. I shall learn about what is going to happen!

SANJAYA *(Nodding)* That's a job for leaders, not for drama. *(With a sudden change of tone)* But you have done better than me! If I have jolted you out of your present consciousness, you speak by mixing up the past and the present!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Smiling)* Is that all? Well this is neither your magic nor my sleight of hand. An old man mixes the two times and forgets that he has done so!

SANJAYA *(Sadly)* The reason why I brought this up is that my play has been ruined by it!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Trying to give him courage)* Forget about it! Well, I asked you to tell a story just to while away time, and you

showed it as drama! What does it matter if such a drama is ruined? Or for that matter if it succeeds? The main thing is time was spent!

SANJAYA You don't understand, Dharteppa! *(Moving to the edge of the stage, looking up at the sky)* Oh God! What great drama I wanted to show and what happened!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Looking at Sanjaya from where he stands)* What was that play? Please tell me about it, at least to me alone.

SANJAYA *(Continuing to look at him)* It is about glory! About heroic courage!

DHRITARASHTRA That glory, that courage, were they yours or somebody else's?

SANJAYA *(Turning towards him as if to explain)* They belong to the heroes of Bharata, Bharata's excellent warriors'! *(Looks at the sky again)*

DHRITARASHTRA They--do they belong to the present or the past?

SANJAYA *(As if suddenly waking up)* What did you say?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Approaching him smiling)* Didn't you see? I blurted out what was in my mind! Haha! Look here, after all you are a mere boy before me, Sanjappa. Did you intend to mesmerize this old man with your tale of heroes and your brave men as if he is a boy? Didn't you see? When I just asked whether they belonged to the present or past, you blurted out the secret. Why? Because they belonged to no historical time, they were mere creatures concocted in your head.

SANJAYA Tche! Tche! What words, Dharteppa! Forget about the people of the present, we can't talk about them because in the present there are laws about it. But look at those from the past! Just look at the Pandavas familiar to both of us! What great heroes! What brave souls! *(Stands opposite to Dhritarashtra)*

DHRITARASHTRA But all trees are of the same seed. *(Closes his eyes)*

SANJAYA *(As if mesmerized walks Dhritarashtra gradually towards the stage of the play-within-play)* That's what you think? True, you are Dhritarashtra, senior to everyone. But, don't you agree that Pandavas were full of bravery? Tell me with your eyes closed... Tell me...Close your eyes! They were not afraid of the twelve year exile in the forest. Don't you think they were brave souls?

DHRITARASHTRA *(Eyes closed)* Their greatness stopped with it!

SANJAYA *(Enthused)* What was it you said? *(In a hopeful tone)* Tell me... tell me with eyes closed... Really stopped with it? *(Now Dhritarashtra has moved to the centre of the inner stage-within-stage. Sanjaya stands to his left in humility. Now both realize that they are characters from the original Mahabharata)*

DHRITARASHTRA Yes. Stopped with that, their greatness! *(Light dims, turning to total darkness by the time these words finish)* I had thought they were heroes prepared to make great self--sacrifice! After completing thirteen years of forest--exile, emerging from the prison of tribulations. But what happened next? They began to aspire with passion for kingdom, authority! Everyone--Bhishma, Vidura, Drupada, Drona--one after another, came to me pestering me, Let them also have kingdom, authority... Give, give, give.' Yes! Finally, even Krishna!

KRISHNA'S VOICE off--stage,

Samnaiva kurubhihi sandhim icchanti kurupungavaha
Prayacchantu pradatavyam ma vaha kalotyagadayam

Light on the inner stage. Dhritarashtra is seated in the centre. Sanjaya stands to his left, bowing with humility. Now Sanjaya calls one by one, saying in Sanskrit 'Uvacha'. They appear one after another, reciting their sloka to Dhritarashtra and then exit

SANJAYA *(In a dramatic style)* Bhishma Uvacha–

BHISHMA *(In costumes of commercial theatre)*

Na rocate vigraho me panduputraihi kathancana
Madhurenaiva rajyasya tesamardham pradatayatam (Exits)

SANJAYA Vidura Uvacha–

VIDURA *(In theatrical costume)*

Yatcca samnaiva sakyeta karyam sadhayitum nrpa
Ko daivasaptaha tatkaryam vigrahena samacaret (Exit)

SANJAYA Arjuna Uvacha–

ARJUNA *(In the costume donned in the earlier scene of the play)*

Asanseham vasudevadvitiyo
Duryodhanam sanubandham nihantum (Exit)

SANJAYA Karna Uvacha–

KARNA *(In theatrical costume)*

Aham hi pandavan sarvan hanisyami, rane sthitan
Pragviraddhaihi samam sadbhihi katham va kriyate punaha (Exits)

SANJAYA Duryodhana Uvacha

DURYODHANA (In the earlier costume)

Yavaddhi sucyaha tikshnayaha vidhyedagrena maris
Tavadapyparityajyam bhumernaha pandavan prati (Exits)

SANJAYA Dhritarashtra U..va..cha

Dhritarashtra (In his dress)

Krosato me na sranvanti balah panditamaninah
Yuddhe vinasaha kritsnasya vayam santyai yatamahe

In a tone of despair, as a helpless blind man. He stumbles rising from his seat, as it becomes completely dark. By the time he speaks further words, there is light. By this time Dhritarashtra and Sanjaya should move back to their original stage.

I am shouting here, *Krosato me na sunvanti krosato krosato me*

Tchi! Nobody is listening. Nobody wants to listen! Bhishma and Vidura ask me to give them half the kingdom, Arjuna boasts that if we didn't offer it, they will massacre all of us.

Karna shouts that he will singly hack Pandavas to pieces. Duryodhana proclaims that he will not offer them even land as small as the size of a pin--head! I am shouting here that war leads to destruction of all. Everyone thinks he knows best and refuses to listen to me. Everybody feels he is an authority by himself!

As the two stand on the stage, light falls on them only

DHRITARASHTRA Power! Power! Authority! Finally they have got the authority and power to go to war against each other! The power and authority to kill each other! That was so then and that is so now! What new thing did you find, boy? That's why I say, let us stop this. Let us go.

SANJAYA *(Dispiritedly)* Well, a new thing has emerged, thanks to you!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Uncomprehending)* What is that for which you thank me?

SANJAYA *(A little ruffled)* Ruining my drama!

DHRITARASHTRA You and your drama, you have been bitten by the drama bug! Damn your wretched drama! There is none wanting to see it! Who then is interested in it enough to ruin it?

SANJAYA *(Hides anger rising in spite of his effort to control it)* I have been saying all along that a play should be watched from a distance! But you plunged into it yourself, smearing their faces with paint, clothing them with gold brocaded costumes...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* Damn you! I have no white lime powder even to paint my house. I do not fancy new clothes myself. Where the devil do you think I can get paint for another person's face and brocaded dress for his body'?

SANJAYA *(Angry)* If that is so, why then did Bhishma, Vidura, Arjuna, Karna, Duryodhana and the rest, why did they appear in theatrical costumes? Tell me on oath whether you also used to don such costumes?

DHRITARASHTRA *(With a dissatisfied tone)* Why ask me? Address your question to those who stage the drama!

SANJAYA *(Rising, anger visible in his face)* Let's not ask them and let's not go about in their style! I tried hard to stage a new type of drama, but you....

DHRITARASHTRA *(Unable to hide his disappointment)* Why are you harping again on me?

SANJAYA *(Angry and adamant)* Yes, you... you... you... y-o-u... Don't I know? You have been doing such deeds from the Dwapara age, haven't you? *(Mimicking him) Yuddhe vinasaha kritsnasya vayam santyai yajamahe.* Ahaha! Well, I have seen your peace efforts through the ages! On the one hand, repeating before Pandavas the slogan of peace, and, on the other egging Duryodhana to go to war! If anyone complained, you have the standard response, 'Blind fellow, what can I do?'! It was so then, it is so now! While at court, applauding the leaders, currying their favour, and back home blaming the leaders to earn the applause of the rest! If anyone asked you, all you say is, 'What can I do. I am a subject, a poor fellow who is blind despite eyesight'! Urging me to tell a story and show you the drama, but crashing onto the stage to ruin the drama! Dhritarashtra, Dharteppa, I cannot stand it any longer. I have determined now to expose the secret of your true nature. I shall draw out all the contents from the innermost recesses of your consciousness so that it can be as easily read as a writing on a slate, like an inscription in stone, for the whole world!

DHRITARASHTRA Is your belly cooled at last by spitting out all its accumulated fire? Now you listen to me. I am telling you. I shall proclaim it from the housetop! Today's Sanjappa is yesterday's Sanjaya. He is at his old game. Then he first praised Kauravas and switched later to praising Pandavas, and today he is a sycophant showering praise on ministers. Next, he will change sides to shower praise on others. I shall shout to the world, don't you trust this fellow!

SANJAYA *(Stubbornly)* All right! Let's see who does it first!

For a minute they are silent, staring at each other. After that....

DHRITARASHTRA *(Suddenly changing his tone)* My dear Sanjappa, look here. I got angry and so did you. We had our egos satisfied by screaming at each other, right? Let's forget all that. Come, let's go. *(Sanjaya does not respond)* No, not with me. You go to your own house and sleep. Why should we withhold sleep and upset our minds. *(Sanjaya shakes his head... to indicate a decisive no)* If you do not want to go, it is all right for me. You stay here *(He leaves. Sanjaya takes a few steps to move to the edge of the stage in order to sit there relaxing. Then he turns back and tries to move towards Dhritarashtra)* Go home! Why do you sit in the open like a mad man?

SANJAYA *(Without looking at him)* You go, Dharteppa, I shall stay back here.

DHRITARASHTRA What will you do sitting here alone? You wanted to draw out the contents of my mind, but what will you do after I am gone?

SANJAYA *(Still not looking at him)* I shall do what my preceptor did.

DHRITARASHTRA *(Provocatively)* Are there preceptors to teach even such things? Who are they? Where are they?

SANJAYA Now they do not exist. They do not belong to the present...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* Well, that's what I am saying. When no preceptors exist today, how can you talk about them?

SANJAYA He was my preceptor in my previous birth... *(Turning his face towards Dhritarashtra, sitting as before)* Shall I openly proclaim to people how you were born as a son to him?

DHRITARASHTRA *(In a counter-challenging tone)* You want to tell them how I became blind age after age due to their influence? (Staring at him intensely for a moment) I am asking

you for the last time. Are you coming with me or are you worrying your head sitting here?

SANJAYA *(Without looking at him)* I told you I have work to do here, didn't I?

DHRITARASHTRA You mean repeating what some preceptors of yours did?... In that case finish it double fast. Then we can go.

SANJAYA *(Facing the audience, raising his hands, with as loud a voice as possible). Urdhvabahur viraumesa*

DHRITARASHTRA *(Rushing to him, shouting, and forcibly shutting his mouth with his hand)* What has come over you, Sanjaya, to scream like that in this cool hour as if tearing your heart out? If people heard your voice and collected...

SANJAYA *(Suddenly loosening his grip)* That is precisely what I want. Let as many as possible gather. I have to tell all of them collectively the story of Bharata--tell them what havoc in Bharata was done by Dhritarashtra.....

DHRITARASHTRA *(Doubtfully)* What did you say?

SANJAYA *(As if not hearing his words)*... That this Dhritarashtra is the root cause of all fighting...

DHRITARASHTRA *(Still doubting)* Have you gone mad? Out of your senses?

SANJAYA *(Unmindful)*... Owing to the cunning of this Dhritarashtra the war took place....

DHRITARASHTRA ....What?

SANJAYA *(Continuing)*... that all perished excepting him....

DHRITARASHTRA *(Forcing his attention)* Are you saying that in that life, all perished excepting me?

SANJAYA *(Threateningly)* I shall tell all this... That's exactly what I said! I am asking you why I shouldn't tell all this... That's what I said...

DHRITARASHTRA That means you want to reveal the secret that Dhritarashtra of then and Dharteppa of now are the same person?

SANJAYA *(Contemptuously)* Secret? How did you get this idea of a secret, Dharteppa? Do you imagine none knows that from that time, with or without eyesight, you have been using blindness as an excuse? Haha! Quite a secret this blind man's!

DHRITARASHTRA Look here, Sanjappa. You are saying that I was there in that age. That is in the story then written. It is you who are saying that now I exist today. In the context of this play, how can one trust one man's word as evidence of my existence?

SANJAYA *(Jolted)* Now, Dharteppa, what are you driving at? Do you need any other proof of your existence?

DHRITARASHTRA That is my doubt, Sanjappa

SANJAYA *(Scared)* What are you saying?

DHRITARASHTRA You are saying I am a living creature, living human being. If I am entitled to be called a living thing, a stone should also be so entitled. Do you agree?

SANJAYA *(Mustering courage by laughing)* Oh! Yes! I understand all right! Haha!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Adamantly)* You haven't understood, and I shall not let you off. You boast, don't you that you write that and show this? Tell me one thing. If left to itself, a stone stays where it is. It moves forward only if someone pushes it. It rises if someone lifts it. But of their own will, stones don't move to a definite place... Now what I and you, ordinary human beings, what do we do? Someone speaks, and we listen. Someone pushes and we move. Someone drags and we run. Someone points and we see. In sum, what is that we do we can call ours? How do we differ from a stone? Why I am alive? Why not a stone?

SANJAYA *(Doubting)* Is your head cracked or do you want my head cracked...?

DHRITARASHTRA I go further. I am saying we have no heads at all! Where is the question of our heads being cracked?

SANJAYA *(A little enlightened)* But there is this tongue. Our tongue has the power to speak, the art of speech, that no other creature has.

DHRITARASHTRA That is why we fell behind other creatures, Sanjaya!

SANJAYA So?

DHRITARASHTRA What does it mean? To cheat others through words and even deceive ourselves, attaching ourselves to happiness, forgetting the very fact of our being alive! That is, I am saying that you are trying to reveal a secret without reflecting on the limits of words.

SANJAYA If I say that you have been the same from then to now....

DHRITARASHTRA *(Intervening)* Are you saying I am as I was? But have you forgotten? Then when writing the story, you said I was burnt in the forest fire. *(Laughing)* Don't you see that your tongue itself tells one thing then and something else now? *(Coming closer as if to placate him)* Are you through? Get up now. The story itself has ended *(Helps him get up)*

SANJAYA *(Smiling)* It has not ended.

DHRITARASHTRA Well, you can finish it as we walk together! Come! *(Walks him, taking his hand)*

SANJAYA *(After some four steps, suddenly freeing his hand, stopping)* Oh, you do not want anyone to know the end? *(Facing the audience)* I... here... See... People have gathered already. I shall tell them... *(Continues to face the audience)*

DHRITARASHTRA *(Condescending smile of a senior)* What do you want to tell them? *(Makes a sign to the audience that Sanjaya's head had cracked)*

SANJAYA *(Happy in the expectation to disappoint Dhritarashtra)* I shall proclaim that finally Dhritarashtra did not win the trip to

heaven! Haha!... Heaven for the victor and his followers--no--their dog, for them only, not for Dhritarashtra! Haha!... *(Stamps his feet one after the other, standing where he is)*

DHRITARASHTRA What the devil are you upto? *(As Sanjaya stamps his feet with the same pace)* Good heavens! I thought it was just fun but you have really gone mad, have you? *(As Sanjaya's stamping increases in pace, Dhritarashtra is really scared)* Sanjappa, Sanjanna, Sanju, please stop, stop. *(As the pace of stamping becomes furious, he circles round)* Stop it! Don't do anything silly...

SANJAYA Not anything silly. I am climbing to the heaven *(Muttering as if counting the steps)* One lakh... ten lakhs... yes, one crore! *(Sighing, extremely tired)* Now at last we have reached heaven!

DHRITARASHTRA *(away and staring at him)* Reached heaven? Don't you know you are where you were?

SANJAYA Dharteppa, I staged this play to teach you arithmetic, but you learnt nothing in the end!

DHRITARASHTRA What arithmetic?

SANJAYA Arithmetic experts say that if we take a crore of steps, we reach heaven. Now I have stamped one crore steps. I must have reached heaven. Do you question the calculation of experts?

DHRITARASHTRA That means...Are you saying we have reached heaven? *(Sanjaya nods affirmatively)* Both of us? *(Sanjaya nods in agreement)* I am asking 'both' because I did not do the physical exercise you did...

SANJAYA *(Intervening)* No need for it. I am the leader who goes forward and you are the dog following me. If I reach heaven it is as good as your reaching it!

DHRITARASHTRA *(Face beaming with hope)* I have reached! Is it true? *(Sanjaya nods in agreement)* There is no hocus-pocus in this? *(Sanjaya nods in agreement)* Even if I don't reach, it is as if I have reached! Bravo! Possessing without possessing! Bravo!

Bravo! Sanjappa, this is indeed a novelty! Bravo, making the havenots feel happy that they have what they really do not have! Sanjappa, this is the crown you have put on the story of Bharata!

SANJAYA That is what is called progress.

DHRITARASHTRA Stamping feet in the same spot! *(Mimicks Sanjaya's action by doing a couple of steps)*

SANJAYA *(To audience)* When you go home, don't forget these words...

DHRITARASHTRA *(With pride)* Tche! This is no story to forget!

SANJAYA If so, let's finish it here. Come. In a way we too won't forget it, whatever happens. *(Walks him to the centre of the stage, holding his hand)* I will join my palms in prayer and you close your eyes.

DHRITARASHTRA AND SANJAYA TOGETHER Yes

Jayonametihasoyam srotavyam vijigisuna
Yadihasti tadanyatra yannehasti na tat kvacit
Drisyate satatam lokaylihi yatra Sri-ranga-bharatam
Srisca kiritisca vidya ca bhavanti muditaha sada

While this goes on, Sanjaya, making sure that Dhritarashtra has closed his eyes, slowly stretches his joined hands. This is the opportunity to earn spiritual merit for the audience.

The End

THREE DOORS TO HEAVEN

(1970)

Svargakke Mure Bagilu

Translated by ***Usha Desai***



CHARACTERS

- Voice of a Woman
- Tirukappa / A Blind Beggar
- Priest / The Court Pandit / Stranger
- Young Woman / Woman / Flower girl
- Middleaged Man / Minister / A Gentleman
- A Youth / Rebel / Policeman
- Old Man / King / Elderly Man
- Middle-aged Woman / 'Mother'
- Rest of the Cast: Crowd, two Guards, three Workers, four helpers in uniform, another Youth and his Friend
- Since these characters appear in succesive scenes they can be played by the same actor / actress

THE FIRST DOOR

The following two slokas from the Rigveda should be recited clearly before the lights go off, both on the stage and in the auditorium. The first verse should be in a woman's voice and the actor playing the role of the priest in the First Act should recite the translation. The second verse should be recited jointly by the artists enacting the role of the minister and the policeman, and the translation by the actor in the role of the blind beggar. As the second verse is being recited, it gets gradually dark. As soon as the recitation is over, the curtain opens, like doors, and the stage becomes bright

WOMAN'S VOICE

Aham rastri samgamani vasunam / Cikitusi prathamaa yajniyanam / Tam ma deva vyadadhuh purutra / Bhuristhatram bhuryavesayantim.

PRIEST'S VOICE I am the mistress of this land, of the whole world. I am the giver of desires. I am the storehouse of knowledge, the acme of purity. I am omnipresent; I represent one and all. The Gods themselves have placed me here.

VOICES OF MINISTER AND POLICEMAN

Maya so annamatti yo vipasyati / Yah praniti ya im srnotyuktam / Amantavo mam ta upaksiyanti / Srudhi sruta sraddhivam te vadami.

BEGGAR'S VOICE All that you eat, all that you see, all that you hear, your very breath is because of me. Those who oppose my supremacy will perish. Listen! Oh, listen and have faith in my words.

A raised platform in the centre of the stage, with five steps each on four sides. At the top is the main door of a temple. A priest stands on the highest step, eyes closed, right arm extended in blessing. At the bottom of the steps, people, saluting the priest, stand in a semicircle, some with heads bent, some kneeling and some prostrating themselves on the ground. Among them are an Old Man, a Middle-aged Man, a Youth, and two women-one middle-aged and the other young. Their dress, speech and appearance show that they are poor and illiterate. At

a distance, to the left (left and right are always with reference to the spectators) is a blind beggar. He seems to be on his own.

After a minute or so

PRIEST *(In the somber voice of sloka-recitation)* Mother Adishakti– She is the mistress of the whole universe. Mother Adishakti- -She is the giver of all desires. Mother Adishakti- she is the first among all gods and goddesses. When she smiles, there is the brightness of heaven, when she is angry, the darkness of hell.

YOUTH *(Still on his knees, slowly looks up, muttering to himself)* Darkness and light! As if the rain can see!

The blind beggar appreciating this, nods and laughs

PRIEST *(Authoritatively)* Who is that? What did you say?

YOUTH *(As if he is far away)* I said that the rain doesn't need light, Pujarappa!

PRIEST *(Arrogantly)* Impudence!

OLD MAN *(Humbly)* Swami, the boy asks why the all-giving Mother doesn't give us rain?

PRIEST The Mother is angry.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN Please tell us what our sin is, Swami.

PRIEST Who can understand the Mother's wishes?

OLD MAN If a sin has been committed, we'll pay the penalty, Pujarappa.

PRIEST *(Pityingly)* Fools! The Mother forgives, she doesn't punish.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN *(To herself-tapping her cheeks)* Forgive your children's mistakes and give us rain, oh Mother!

PRIEST Mistake? No, there's no mistake.

YOUTH Then why is there no rain Swami?

PRIEST Somebody has sinned.

OLD MAN What sin, Pujarappa? Tell us. We can sacrifice a life...

PRIEST *(Interrupts)* A sin doesn't call for sacrifice. There has to be a fitting atonement.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN And what is that? Tell us, Swami!

YOUTH And tell us who the sinner is. *(The blind beggar again shows his appreciation)*

PRIEST It may not be your sin.

YOUTH That's why I want to know who's the sinner. If it isn't us, it is you...?

PRIEST *(Thunders)* What did you say?

OLD MAN Forgive him, he's young, he doesn't understand. But I beg of you, ask Mother, ask her what the sin is and who's the sinner. Didn't you say there's atonement for every sin? I promise you I'll atone. Otherwise I'll cut off my head and place it at Mother's feet.

PRIEST Fools! They think the Great Mother will talk to me!

YOUTH Then tell us with whom She will talk.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN Swami, if we could understand these things, would we have taken on the burden of this birth? It's your job to make her talk. You're the blessed one, your people have been doing this for generations. Don't abandon us, Swami.

OLD MAN There's great distress because there's no rain.

YOUTH The cattle have nothing to graze on.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Not a drop of milk in the cows' udders.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN Not a morsel of food for growing children.

PRIEST But young men continue to be impudent. And young girls are still immoral.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Don't say such things, Pujarappa. And that too in the presence of *(looks at the young girl)* young girls.

PRIEST *(In anger)* Why? Tell me, what other reason is there for the Mother's anger? God gets angry only when humans sin.

YOUTH When you can't even tell us what's our sin, how can you say we have sinned, Pujarappa?

PRIEST The Mother is angry. That is proof enough.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN Please talk to Her and confirm it, Swami.

PRIEST There's no need. It hasn't rained-that's proof enough.

The young girl who has not uttered a single word so far, slowly gets up, her face downcast. The others look at her in surprise.

OLD MAN Hey! Why are you getting up, girl?

YOUNG WOMAN Anyone with self-respect would walk away from such talk.

OLD MAN Whatever the elders say is good. Understand?

YOUNG WOMAN *(In a confessional tone)* If I've sinned, I'll jump into a well and kill myself.

YOUTH Who's blaming you?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Sit, child, sit down. *(She takes her by the hand, makes her sit)* Who said the sin is yours? They say being born a woman is itself a sin; but what can we do about that? Sit down, child.

She sits down

YOUTH *(With contempt)* Pujarappa himself doesn't know who's the sinner.

BEGGAR Why could I not be the sinner, Master?

Except for the priest, the others have been unaware of his presence so far. They look at him in surprise

OLD MAN *(Laughing)* You're still here, are you?

BEGGAR I'am always near God–wherever he is. Who else can protect this blind man?

PRIEST *(Contemptuously)* You're blind because of all the sins of your previous births. Even God can't help you.

BEGGAR Isn't that the priest's voice? I don't want anything, Pujarappa. Ask your god to help these people who work so hard just to survive--that's enough. Is it a sin to live by one's hard work?

PRIEST Who says people have sinned or that they've sinned in this birth?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(Frightened)* If not us, who is it then?

YOUTH If we haven't sinned, why should we suffer?

OLD MAN Pujarappa, only you understand these things. Tell us what we should do to bring rains.

PRIEST What can anyone do about the accumulated sins of many births? How do I explain to you ignorant people? Who knows the consequences of a sin?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN If no one else knows, the Mother will, Swami. Pray to Her and place a flower on Her head. We'll have an answer when it falls, either to the left or the right.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(With folded hands)* Master, do us poor people that favour. Ask the Mother why there is no rain.

OLD MAN And then I'll give whatever you ask.

They look at him hopefully. The priest stands for a moment as though in deep thought, and finally takes a deep breath.

PREIST The obstinacy of fools! You have to suffer what's written in your fate. *(Looking at them with pity goes into the temple. As he goes in, he remembers something, turns back and closes the door)*

For a minute they look at one another nervously and sigh

BEGGAR *(Nervously)* Has Pujarappa gone in?

OLD MAN Yes.

BEGGAR *(In a normal voice)* He's closed the door, hasn't he?

YOUTH *(Smiles as he starts rising)* I say! Can you see?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(Noticing that the Beggar is shaking his head)* How did you know, blind man? There was no sound at all.

He climbs up two steps and sits facing the beggar

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN *(Gets up and looks at the door)* Why should this door make any sound? It gets all the oil our lamps lack.

She sits on the step below the one the Middle-aged Man is sitting on

YOUNG WOMAN Shall I go? I don't think there is anything I can do.

BEGGAR Sit down, sister. You shouldn't go away without hearing the Mother's words.

OLD MAN *(Goes towards the Beggar, but sits a little away from him)* Hmm, how did you know that the preist had closed the door? Come on, tell me.

BEGGAR Master, this is not a new story. It happens all the time. The same thing happened in the past.

OLD MAN The past! You can't see what is happening now and you talk of the past. Ha! Ha! Maybe, you could see in those days!

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Poor man! That was a mistake, it just slipped out of him. There's no need to taunt him!

BEGGAR I didn't say it by mistake, Amma. I know what happened in the past.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Smiling)* Tirukappa, are you saying that you are older than that ancient tree at our village gate?

They laugh

BEGGAR My child, don't forget that I'm blind.

YOUTH So! Now we know who's a blind man. He can't see anything now, but he can see the past–when he wasn't even living.

OLD MAN Oh come on! Let him be. *(To Beggar)* Don't pay them any attention. They're just kids. But you and I are of

the same age. That is why I'm asking you. Do you think I can also see the past?

BEGGAR But Master, you are not blind!

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(Smiling)* Do you have to be blind to see the past? Ha! Ha!

BEGGAR See, Master, it's like this. People with sight know a today and a tomorrow. Isn't that right? But for someone like me, who doesn't know when it is day and when it is night, age means nothing. That's why I say--I was then, I am now, and I will be in the future.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN I've heard there are such long-living people in the Puranas that brahmins narrate.

BEGGAR *(With satisfaction)* Yes, Amma, I am just like that.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN God knows what this Tirukappa is trying to say! *(To people standing in a semicircle)* Does anyone understand him? *(They shake their heads)*

YOUTH It's all right. Keep your secrets. But I want to know one thing- can a person who sees the past know what's going on behind that closed door?

The puja bell rings

BEGGAR That's a puja going on.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Clapping)* He hears the bell and he says a puja is going on. Ha Ha! *(Sits on the lowest step, just below the Old Man)*

BEGGAR *(Smiles)* Do you think a blind man shouldn't hear, sister?

YOUNG WOMAN We don't need a blind man--from the past-to tell us that a puja is going on when the puja bell rings.

BEGGAR If you interrupt me, it's no use.

OLD MAN Forget it, Tirukappa. Don't take that hoyden so seriously. You want to tell us something. Go on.

BEGGAR You asked me what's happening behind those closed doors, didn't you?

YOUTH I asked you long back, Tirukappa. You still have to give me an answer.

BEGGAR You heard the bell ringing, didn't you?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN Yes? Go on.

BEGGAR The bell rings, the conch is blown, the priest's voice calls out, 'Oh! Mother.'

YOUNG WOMAN We can all hear that...

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Shut your mouth, wretch!

BEGGAR It is all right, Amma, The young are thoughtless. Hmm, now ask me some more, sister. Will you? *(She does not reply)* Why, child, ask me? Where are you, child?

YOUNG WOMAN I am right here. But they tell me to shut my mouth...

BEGGAR *(Laughing)* And I say don't close your ears.

YOUTH You haven't still begun your story, blind man.

BEGGAR I'm coming to it. As I was saying, you can hear what's going on inside. But none of it is true.

OLD MAN What are you saying, blind man?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN You mean what we hear is false?

BEGGAR The things that you hear are true, all right. What I'm trying to say is that what happened there in the past, what's happening there now–It's all a lie.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN It isn't right to call a puja a lie.

BEGGAR Listen to me, Amma...

OLD MAN *(Suddenly confronting everyone)* Look here! For the last time–now, don't interrupt me. *(To Beggar)* Tell me, blind man, what is the priest doing inside?

BEGGAR *(Meditatively)* He's thinking of how to shear foolish sheep like you people.

OLD MAN What?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Chhee! Don't say such things.

YOUTH Who did you call sheep?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(To the others)* Now you know the blind man sees all kinds of things!

BEGGAR Listen, boy. You--you are the fools.

OLD MAN *(Controlling his anger, smiles)* Hey, do you think because we won't hurt a blind man, you can get away with anything?

BEGGAR *(Surprised)* Come on, Master. Say you don't want me to speak and I'll stop.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN We don't mean that, but when it's about Gods and Brahmins...

Sounds of bell and conch. The Middle-Aged Woman, the Old Man and The Beggar mechanically tap their cheeks with their finger tips and do a namaskar. The Middle-Aged Man and the Young Woman watch them and, as if they must do it, qucickly go through these rituals as well

OLD MAN *(To Beggar)* There! You see! Pujarappa is taking so much trouble because we asked him to...

BEGGAR *(Interrupting)* Closing doors--it makes you suspicious...

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Do you want us to pollute the sacred rites?

YOUTH *(Smiling)* You know what the blind man will say- look at it with closed eyes and you won't pollute anything.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN *(To Youth)* Oh, stop it now! That's enough!

OLD MAN Look here, blind man. Each one has his place. God's place is there, ours is here. And Pujarappa is the in--between.

Stands before the door, taps his cheeks and circumambulates.

YOUTH *(watching the Old Man surreptitiously, speaks to the Beggar confidentially)* Blind Man, tell me what you want to say, I'll listen.

BEGGAR *(Showing surprise)* I? What do I have to say?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Approaching Youth)* Yes, he wanted to say something, He stopped as soon as he heard the bell and conch. I noticed that.

YOUTH *(Encouraging him)* Yes, tell us. What did you suspect when he closed the door? *(The Beggar seems frightened)* Don't worry, there's nobody here; they are busy going round in circles. So tell us...

BEGGAR *(As if telling a secret)* I don't understand why a man who's talking to the Mother on your behalf should keep you at a distance?

YOUNG WOMAN We shouldn't go in, we may pollute the place.

BEGGAR *(Shaking his head)* But you don't have to go in! You're watching from outside. Why bolt the door?

YOUTH Why did he do that? Come on, tell me quickly, someone may hear us.

BEGGAR He isn't going to talk to the Mother at all.

YOUNG WOMAN But that's his job, Tirukappa.

BEGGAR *(Again shaking his head)* No, he's not talking to her. And he's shut the door so that you won't know it.

YOUTH *(Smiling)* Even if he leaves the door open, we won't understand. He'll be speaking the language of the mantras, won't he?

BEGGAR Why can't he speak to her in our language like Lakumavva does?

YOUTH *(Taken aback)* Like whom did you say?

YOUNG WOMAN *(To Youth)* Yes, of course! When God enters into Lakumavva, she doesn't go bhasam bhasam like Pujarappa. She speaks to god just like us.

BEGGAR That's exactly what I said. She talks to God in your presence and in your language. You should have asked her. Why have you come here instead?

YOUTH That's true. *(Snapping his fingers, he calls the rest of the crowd and whispers to them. They look pleased and exit running)* Okay, Tirukappa, I've asked them to look for Lakumavva and make her wait. In the meantime, let's see what the priest has to say.

BEGGAR *(With a knowing smile on his face)* I know that story...

YOUNG WOMAN *(Laughing)* Did you see it or hear it in your last birth?

YOUTH Yes, tell us the truth, Tirukappa! Have you seen or heard it in your previous birth? Ha, ha, ha!

OLD MAN *(Looking in their direction)* Tirukappa hasn't finished his story as yet, has he?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN What else does he have to do? He doesn't have to work to fill his stomach?

Sudden silence as they hear the sombre voice of the priest chanting, 'Oh! Great Mother!' The Priest opens the door and comes out. He does not look at any one directly. He looks into the temple with intensity and raising his hands, palms together, he says, 'Oh Great Mother, your wish is for us order. It will be done'. Turns round and looks at people with sorrow and pity. His gaze and his silence together create an atmosphere of fear

PRIEST *(Sadly, shaking his head)* I can't do anything. It's because you people were so adamant that I had to trouble the Mother.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN *(Still with eyes closed and folded hands)* If Mother is angry, who's there for us?

Watching her, the middle aged Man also closes his eyes

OLD MAN *(Submissively)* Pujarappa, tell us the truth–whatever it is. I'm ready for it.

PRIEST How do I tell you, old Man? *(As though coming to a decision)* No! I can't say it, it's impossible.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN They're the Mother's words. If you repeat them, it doesn't mean you wish us ill.

PRIEST *(As if to himself)* Amma, human minds can't understand what's good and what's bad.

OLD MAN Whatever the Mother tells us is for our good, isn't it, Pujarappa?

PRIEST *(Trying to look sad)* Does it matter whether I say yes?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN If you tell us, Swami, we'll understand everything.

PRIEST I'll tell you. But think it over. You can't refuse afterwards. That will be a sin, *(Raises his hands to silence them)* Wait! The Mother wants a completely new offering; think about it. *(Suddenly goes in and comes out)* Old Man, if I speak, it's only to you. Send the others away. *(Looking at Beggar)* Yes, even him. And then call me. *(Goes in and closes the door)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN Offering!

He walks to the steps as though his legs have no strength and sits on the steps facing the spectators, holding his head

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Did he say that it was a new kind of offering? *(Looks at Old Man with fear)*

YOUTH *(Coming near Old Man)* I wonder why he wants to speak only to you.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Hugging Old Man)* Ajja, if it is the offering of a life, let me die instead of you.

OLD MAN *(Laughing, pats her on her back tenderly)* Chhe! Silly girl! Pujarappa didn't speak of sacrificing a life. He said it was something new. Don't be scared. Neither you nor I will die-not until I get you married and see great grand children! Ha, ha, ha!

Complete silence for a minute

YOUTH Can I say something? *(All look at him)* I think Pujarappa is trying to frighten us.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN I have the same feeling.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Stop it and as it is, we're carrying a load of sins. Don't add to them by suspecting the priest.

YOUNG WOMAN But to believe that he's giving us the Mother's words...

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN You shut up! This stupid girl is forgetting her god and religion.

BEGGAR Poor girl! Why do you get angry with her, mother?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN Now, you want to teach me, do you?

OLD MAN Leave him alone. But you know, I think you're hissing at everyone because Pujarappa's words have scared you. What he said is the truth. Go away, all of you. Let me hear what he has to say.

YOUTH Listen to me...

OLD MAN *(Interrupting)* I know you won't move until I listen. So, go on, tell me. What is it?

YOUTH Before believing the Priest...

OLD MAN *(Authoritatively to Middle-aged Woman who is waiting to speak)* Will you be quiet now or shall I drive you out? *(To Youth)* Yes, before believing what?

YOUTH Why don't we talk to Lakumavva?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN I was thinking of the same thing...

YOUNG WOMAN Yes, ajja.

The other two are dumbstruck

OLD MAN *(Raises his hand to stop them speaking)* Is Lakumavva greater than Pujarappa? Remember, his family has dedicated itself to serving the Mother.

YOUTH *(Stubbornly)* Great or small is not the question.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN If she was an ordinary person, would god have entered into her?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN It's not god who enters into her. She's barren--that's her disease.

YOUTH Whatever it is, she speaks God's words to us, doesn't she? It's not behind closed doors.

OLD MAN Those who don't trust me can go to Lakumavva. *(Angrily)* Why are you standing here? Go, I say!

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(Tries to pacify him)* We never said that we don't. Ultimately we have to trust him. But let's ask Lakumavva just once.

OLD MAN *(Restraining Middle-aged Woman)* But why?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN Why not? The Pujari wants only you. Talking to Lakumavva will help us to pass the time. It's better than sitting here worrying about what he's saying, getting scared about the sacrifice. Don't you trust us?

OLD MAN *(In a disgusted tone)* Hmm! Just leave this place. That's enough. Go on! *(To Beggar)* Go away, blind man. Pujarappa is the master here, he's asked you to go....

YOUTH *(Helping Beggar to get up)* Come with me, blind man, I'll show you the way.

BEGGAR *(Goes with them)* I may not have eyes, but I know my way. Ha, ha, ha! You have eyes, but you can't see your way! Ha, ha, ha!

All except the Old Man exit from the right

OLD MAN *(looks intently at them and pretends to ignore what the Beggar has been saying)* Look at the way he speaks! May be if you can eat without working, you become arrogant. *(Takes a deep breath)* What times we're living in! If people have no faith in the Pujari, there's bound to be famine. *(A sudden gust of wind. He brings his palms together)* Hey! There's cold breeze coming. *(Turns and faces the temple, wiping sweat off his forehead. Calls out softly)* Pujarappa! Pujarappa! *(The door opens slowly. Not seeing the Pujari, he is scared)* What is this? Did the door open by itself? *(He again wipes his sweat. Pujari comes out and looks all around)*

PRIEST Have they gone? Are you alone? *(Old Man nods his head both times)* Sit down. *(Old Man sits near the lowest steps, to the right. Pujari stares at him for a moment)* Are you scared? *(Old Man shakes his head)* Are you willing and ready to do this?

(Old Man nods) Whatever you offer the Mother should be given willingly; otherwise she won't like it. *(Old Man nods again, a little irritably now)* Say it loudly.

OLD MAN I am ready, Pujarappa. Mine is an old body, anyway, I am ready to sacrifice...

The Priest cannot restrain his laughter

PRIEST *(Still laughing)* Who wants your old body, man?

OLD MAN Didn't you say that the Mother wants a sacrifice?

PRIEST But who said that your life was the sacrifice?

OLD MAN This body has lived for many years. I thought not many would have sinned as much...

PREIST *(Authoritatively)* Your sins–or lack of them–don't matter. The Mother is not interested in a shrivelled old body, even if it is full of sin.

OLD MAN *(Scared)* Pujarappa, tell me what the Mother wants.

PRIEST *(Closes his eyes and as if speaking to the goddess)* I asked her too, Oh! Great Mother, Aadishakti, why are you so angry with the poor? Can you not show some mercy? Suddenly the Mother was furious, she looked at me, her eyes red, as if she would burn me. She said, 'Your Mother is faint with hunger. Oh priest! If you cannot satisfy her, this famine will destroy everyone'.

OLD MAN *(Stands humbly as though the Goddess is before him)* True, Mother, it's true. We are your children. If you are full, we are also satisfied. What food do you need now, please tell us, Mother. *(He touches the ground his forehead)*

PRIEST *(Speaking in the same inspired way)* 'I have had enough of offerings of birds and animals, I am disgusted with useless old bodies.'

OLD MAN Mother, when have we given you what you don't want? (Raising his eyes) Tell us, what kind of life...

PRIEST *(As before)* I have a longing for a young life...

OLD MAN *(In a decisive tone)* All right, we'll give you the first girl born in the village...

PRIEST *(Thundering)* I don't want a baby girl....

OLD MAN All right, Mother. Even if it means fewer men to work, we'lll give you a baby boy....

PRIEST *(Roars)* Baby, baby! I don't want a baby!

OLD MAN Then...?

PRIEST *(Shouting)* I want a young life. I am weak with hunger. *(Beats at the ground with both hands)* I want a young life, a young female life, a woman. *(Crying aloud, he falls down unconscious. The Old Man is frightened. He goes to lift the unconscious priest, realizes he cannot touch him and looking around, wrings his hands helplessly. Muttering, 'Pujarappa, Pujarappa', he prays, 'Mother, please save Pujarappa'. The priest gets up)*

PRIEST *(Suddenly wakes up)* Who's that? *(Looks round)* What is this? Where am I? *(Sees Old Man)*

OLD MAN How are you feeling now, Pujarappa?

PRIEST *(Fully awake now, sits as before and stares at Old Man)* What happened, Old Man? I see a glow on your face.

OLD MAN Nothing, Pujarappa. The Mother was here....

PRIEST *(Surprised)* What did you say? The Mother? Did she really appear? Did you see her? No wonder you look radiant. You are blessed, Old Man, you are blessed.

OLD MAN *(Shakes his head)* It's not my doing, Pujarappa. She manifested herself through you.

PRIEST *(As though he can't believe it)* Through me?

OLD MAN *(Shaking his head)* How much trouble you take for us poor people, Pujarappa. It's because of your good deeds that she enters your body.

Sounds of thunder can be heard from far

PRIEST *(Quickly gets up)* Thunder! Old Man, the clouds are gathering. It's the Mother's will, you seem to have agreed to her

request. *(Old Man shakes his head)* What? You haven't? Then why this sudden rain from nowhere...?

OLD MAN *(Interrupting)* I didn't understand what the Mother wants. *(Gets up)*

PRIEST You didn't understand? Did she appear and go away without speaking?

OLD MAN She spoke.

PRIEST What did she say?

OLD MAN She said--I am hungry, I want food to eat.

PRIEST What kind of food--in this famine?

OLD MAN She said she wants a life to be sacrificed, a female life, she said.

PRIEST *(Laughs)* Is that all? What's the problem? Get a hen, get a buffalo....

OLD MAN *(Shaking his head)* She doesn't want animals or birds.

PRIEST *(Frightened)* What? A woman's life?

OLD MAN Yes.

PRIEST *(As if lost in thought)* That's going to be difficult. There! Did you see how strongly the wind is blowing?

OLD MAN This wind will drive away the rain.

PRIEST Anyway, looks like we can't feed the Great Mother.

OLD MAN Why do you say that, Pujarappa?

PRIEST What else? The clouds were gathering and we thought it would rain. And now this wind. The Mother may have realized that we can't give her what she wants and so this wind.

OLD MAN *(Agitated)* Pujarappa, Pujarappa, don't say that. We are willing to sacrifice a female life; you just have to tell us.

PRIEST *(Shaking his head despairingly)* You don't know Old Man; there is a certain method of sacrificing a human life.

OLD MAN You tell us the way, I'll do the rest.

PRIEST *(Comes down a step)* Do you know what kind of sacrifice one must offer in the yajna?

OLD MAN What kind?

PRIEST You have to offer what you love the most, what you want the most.

OLD MAN All right.

PRIEST Whom will you offer, Old Man? And even if you do, do you think I'll agree?

OLD MAN When the Mother asks for it, it has to be done. Whether we agree or not doesn't matter. Can anyone escape death?

PRIEST Death is not important, Old Man! The offering has to be pure. To give up your life at Mother's feet is to reach heaven. That is why the Shastras say a religious sacrifice is the first door to Heaven.

OLD MAN *(Taking a deep breath)* All right. At least we will have the happiness of knowing that my daughter--in--law will go to heaven...

PRIEST *(Suddenly)* Who?

OLD MAN *(Emotionally)* My daughter--in--law, Pujarappa, my daughter–in–law. Didn't you see her here with her daughter? *(Priest shakes his head.)* Listen to me, Pujarappa, you may think I don't care for my daughter--in--law. But I'm sure you'll believe me when I tell you that I need her at least until she gives birth to a son? *(The Priest is silent)* What is it?

PRIEST Didn't I tell you that there is a Shastra for a sacrifice? When you said that the Mother wants a female life, I knew it was impossible.

OLD MAN *(Adamant)* But I'm offering my daughter--in--law...?

PRIEST *(Interrupts)* That's not possible.

OLD MAN I'm the head of the family. When I agree...

PRIEST But I say the Shastras don't.

OLD MAN What Shastras now?

PRIEST The Shastras have clearly defined what kind of woman should be offered.

OLD MAN What kind?

PRIEST She should be immaculate.

OLD MAN So? What's wrong with my daughter-in-law?

PRIEST How do I make you understand? Your daughter-in-law is married, she has children...

OLD MAN So you mean an unmarried woman?

PRIEST Not just that.

OLD MAN What do you mean, Pujarappa? You say being married is not right, you say being unmarried is not right...

PRIEST *(Hopelessly)* This is not about marriage, Old Man. She should have had no relationship with any man. Do you understand me now?

OLD MAN *(Sorrowfully)* 'Should not have had a relationship with any man'. *(Says these words slowly and in a low tone. Folds both his hands and in a pitiful tone)* Pujarappa, I beg of you, look into the Shastras again. Can't you find some other way? There must be a way out, some rule which has pity on an Old Man. I have no grandchildren except this one granddaughter...

PRIEST *(Interrupting)* Oh! The wind is blowing harder. Never mind, let it go. I knew it from the beginning. The Mother is testing us. We are defeated. The wind will drive away the rain. *(Looks at the Old Man's bowed head)* All right, let it go. Even if you agree, it may not be possible.

OLD MAN *(As if he has decided)* I agree, Pujarappa. And why do you say it's not possible?

PRIEST Why? Because of the Shastra.

OLD MAN What other Shastra now? You said you want such a person; I tell you my granddaughter is just the person.

PRIEST It's not enough if you say it. How do you trust a grown girl?

OLD MAN *(Suddenly Provoked)* Pujarappa, if you say such things, even being a Pujari won't save you.

PRIEST *(Interrupting)* Wait, you fool! What can I do? If you cheat the Mother, there will be a catastrophe, the end of the world.

OLD MAN *(Seeing no other way out)* Pujarappa...

PRIEST Enough of talking to this fool! *(Goes inside).*

OLD MAN Wait Pujarappa, I'll send my granddaughter. The sickle and the pumpkin are both in your hands. *(The Priest looks triumphant. He points to the sky and closes the door. There is thunder and lightning. The Old Man watches)* Oh Rain God, save our lives, but protect the honour of my granddaughter! *(Folds his hands and exits from the stage to the right of the spectators)*

Total silence for a minute or two

Thunder, lightning and the swaying of the trees suggest approaching rain. After a moment, the Youth enters from right holding the blind Beggar by the hand. They speak in low tones.

YOUTH There's no one here.

BEGGAR *(Raising his face to the sky)* Hey! It looks as though it is going to rain.

YOUTH Lakkumavva's words always come true, Tirukappa.

BEGGAR *(Eagerly)* Did god enter into her?

YOUTH Of course, he did? And he still hasn't left her. He said, 'I will go only when you offer me a sacrifice.'

BEGGAR *(As before)* What sacrifice? Whose?

YOUTH I don't have time to tell you stories now. I made the mistake of bringing you. Now I have to take you back to your place...

BEGGAR *(Laughs)* I may be blind, but my legs and stick can see the path, boy. I'll go by myself.

YOUTH When I said your place, I didn't mean your usual place, Tirukappa. You have to remain hidden for some time.

BEGGAR Why, boy? The sacrifice is going to take place here...

YOUTH Even if it does, what will you see? Let's both hide- you on one side and I on the other till the others come.

BEGGAR The others? Who else? What about the girl who was joking with me? Is she coming?

YOUTH She's the one going to be scarified--Pujarappa said so. She has to come.

BEGGAR *(Scared)* That girl? The sacrifice?

YOUTH *(Laughs)* Why are you worried, Tirukappa? Her father has agreed.

BEGGAR Who's the man? Such a butcher...

YOUTH He was here, remember? The one who said let's ask Pujarappa, let's ask Lakumavva? That's the man. My sister's husband.

BEGGAR Whoever he is- that butcher...

YOUTH *(Interrupting)* Keep walking, blind man. At first I thought so too. But he is a cunning man.

BEGGAR *(Angrily)* Where's the cunning in offering your daughter as a sacrifice?

YOUTH You can talk after it happens. *(By now they have come to the edge of the stage to the left)* Go straight on just a bit and sit there.

BEGGAR Look here. Just tell me what Lakumavva's god said. Then you can go.

YOUTH Makes no difference whose body they enter- they're all the same. He too said, 'Sacrifice a life.'

BEGGAR No, no--what I want to know is- did he say this girl should be offered?

YOUTH We asked the same question. But the answer has to come from god, hasn't it? He said 'Let her go to the temple', he said. 'The rest will follow.'

BEGGAR *(As though to himself)* Will Pujarappa let her in?

YOUTH Look, Tirukappa, God must have thought of all these things before speaking. Anyway, why should we bother?

Sounds of thunder louder

BEGGAR It is going to rain. There's going to be calamity.

YOUTH Rain may be a calamity for you--you have to sit and beg in the open. But for us, it's not a calamity, Tirukappa. *(Lets go of him)* Can you go? *(He goes. Watching him)* A little to the left, there's a tree ahead. Okay, sit there, nobody will go there... Hmm

Takes a deep breath. Young Woman coming from the right, asks through gestures whether the Beggar has left. Youth nods, goes towards her. They meet centre stage

YOUTH You're not scared, are you?

YOUNG WOMAN *(Brings out a knife from the pallu of her sari and shows it to him)* Look!

YOUTH *(Scared)* Who gave it to you?

YOUNG WOMAN Appa gave it to me. Amma said it's the only way to protect a woman's honour.

YOUTH *(In deep thought)* Hmm.

YOUNG WOMAN *(Puts her hand on his shoulder)* Aree you scared?

YOUTH No, I'm not, I have faith in you... *(Wants to say more but does not find the words. He pats her on the back as though giving her courage and exits from right)*

Young Woman turns towards the temple door and stands still for a few moments. She is dressed neatly, even if in a cheap sari, flowers in

her hair, the pallu of her sari tied at the waist. As she slowly approaches the steps of the temple, she touches both her cheeks with the tips of her fingers, hands crossed. She takes dust from the ground and applies it on her forehead. When she reaches the last step, she coughs twice. The Priest opens the door and asks, 'who's there?' He comes out and standing two steps away watches her. She keeps looking down

PRIEST *(Appreciatively)* I'm sure the Great Mother will be pleased. *(Coming nearer)* You've had a clean bath, haven't you? New sari! *(Looking at her bowed head)* And flowers in your hair. I'm sure your face is just as beautiful. *(Holding her by the chin, lifts her face up. She is forced to look at him)* Such lovely arms... *(Holds her shoulder. She trembles)* Why? *(Looks around)* The breeze is getting colder, isn't it? Come! We'll fall at the Mother's feet and ask her. *(He guides her into the temple. She walks as if in a trance. The Priest closes the door, but before that he peeps out and looks at the sky)* Mother, let it pour. The longer it rains, the better it will be for you servant. *(Closes the door)*

Louder sounds of thunder and streaks of lightning. After a minute, Middle-aged Man enters followed by the Youth and a crowd. The Middle-Aged Man directs each to a particular position

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(To Youth)* You go to the right of the door. If you hear any suspicious sound, break the door and go in. *(To two others)* And you people--stand here near the steps. Don't let anyone come out. *(To two others)* And you stand there and whistle if you see someone coming. *(Old Man comes running from the right)*

OLD MAN *(To Middle-Aged Man)* Have you lost your mind? Isn't it enough that we have no rain? By sinning more...?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(Interrupting)* What sin? Who says so?

OLD MAN Then what are you doing?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN We're standing guard.

OLD MAN *(Surprised)* Guard? Who are you guarding?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN A sacrifice is to take place. We don't want the sacrificial offering to escape.

YOUTH If it does, the rain may go away.

ONE PERSON *(Holding out his hand)* Seem to be raindrops.

Cries of 'What are you doing? Let me go!' in Young Woman's voice can be heard, followed by a loud 'Aiyyo' from the Pujari. Everyone is stunned. The Middle-Aged Man followed by the Old Man run to the top step. They try to stop the Youth from trying to break the door. The door opens by itself. They move away. The Young Woman comes out, forehead smeared with kumkum, hair dishevelled; she is perspiring, panting, her chest heaving. She holds the knife, which is shining and is covered with blood.

OLD MAN *(Suddenly screaming)* Oh God! What a sin you have committed, child! *(As he beats his forehead, there is lightning and thunder just above him. The Middle-Aged Man stretches out his palms)*

MIDDLE-AGED MAN *(Joyfully)* Rain! Rain! This means what my daughter has done is not a sin. No, not a sin!

The Old Man unable to bear this, says, 'It's all over! It's all over! and runs off the stage. The rest suggest that it is raining.

ALL The Mother has come! She has brought rain!

With joyful cries they run up the steps and carry the semiconscious Young Woman in a procession. Middle-Aged Man walks behind them with proud gait. Only Youth remains. He stands there for a minute and closes the door.

BEGGAR What happened? *(Youth turns round, startled)* Is anyone here?

YOUTH *(Coming down to him)* Are you the only one left with me?

BEGGAR I heard the people cheering. What happened?

YOUTH Look! It's going to pour. Let's find some shelter. Then I'll tell you.

BEGGAR Rain or wind–this is my place.

YOUTH If you stand in this pouring rain, you'll be sending down roots by morning, Tirukappa!

BEGGAR Have you seen a banyan tree, boy? The roots come down from the branches and another tree sprouts from these roots.

YOUTH So you'll let down your roots and go on to the next age, will you? Ha, ha, ha.

Loud thunder and peals of laughter can be heard

BEGGAR I know it's raining, but I still don't know who was sacrificed.

YOUTH If you don't go away, you'll be sacrificed as well!

The blind man finds the lowest step with the help of his stick and sits there

BEGGAR As long as the ground isn't slushy, it doesn't matter how much it rains.

Stretches his legs as if he is going to sleep

The First Door is Closed

THE SECOND DOOR

The Scene is similar to the earlier one, but there are two steps less than before and the door and walls show that it is a palace now, not a temple. The blind Beggar of the 1st Act is still there, sitting at the extreme front of the stage to the left. Two guards are standing by the door, with old style weapons like spears and shields. At the moment, the stage is dark. There are dim lights in the auditorium, and the second sloka earlier recited should be recited as before. Following this, the translation of the sloka should be recited and as this is going on, the lights in the auditorium go off. As the recitation ends, lights come up, first on the Beggar and then on the palace. Then the lights go off on the beggar. The guards march towards each other, stand confronting each other and smile when they breathe in and out at the same time.

1st GUARD It's so quiet.

2nd GUARD How can there by any sound when the King is not in the palace?

1st GUARD But isn't the Minister camping here?

2nd GUARD Someone's got to be here when the King goes to war.

1st GUARD Being a minister seems a comfortable job.

2nd GUARD *(Smiling)* What do we know of other people's happiness?

1st GUARD What's there to know? You can see it yourself. The King's always caught up in wars and invasions, but the minister is free of such things. He can stay comfortably at home or in the palace. What does it matter to him who's injured or who's dead.

2nd GUARD Oh well, each to his work! *(Smiles)* For us, it's our legs... *(gestures with his hands)*... Once this way, once that way!

1st GUARD *(Looking at his legs)* Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had feet facing both ways!

2nd GUARD *(Puzzled)* Both ways?

1st GUARD *(Shows with his hands)* If we had feet facing the other way as well *(Gestures again)*... we wouldn't have had to turn our whole body each time. *(2nd Guard laughs)* Anyway, what does it matter? Like you said, each with his legs. *(Asks in low voice)* Do you think our King will win the war this time?

2nd GUARD *(Smiles)* Each to his own worries.

1st GUARD *(Diffidently)* No, not like that. Generally, there would have been news from the war front for the Minister. And the Minister would have announced that we are winning. But that hasn't happened; that's why I asked.

2nd GUARD *(Philosophically)* Win or lose–what does it matter to us? If we win, our king rules that kingdom; if we lose, their king rules here. There'll always be a king and we'll go on counting our steps.

1st GUARD I don't mind walking up and down, I don't find it tiring. All I want is that our jobs continue.

2nd GUARD Exactly! Why should we care about winning or losing? What's important in such times is keeping our jobs.

1st GUARD That's true. Look what's happening to people like us! Give taxes, tributes, gifts to the king; if you don't, pay a fine. If the king asks you to fight, go to the battlefield; if you die, your family is in a mess. If you're injured, you have a problem. Who wants all that! I must say, I don't mind any job, but I wouldn't like to be a common citizen.

2nd GUARD *(Smiling)* So, let's pray that our King comes back alive; doesn't matter whether he wins or loses.

1st GUARD Sure, I'll pray. Let him come back alive. Our lives, our food–we owe it all to him.

VOICE OF THE BEGGAR 'What you eat, what you see, your breath, what you hear–it's all because of me...'

BOTH *(Surprised)* Hey! *(The lights come on the Beggar)* Who's he?

BEGGAR *(In the same style)* 'Those who ignore my power face destruction. Listen to me and believe me.' *(Looks at the Guards and laughs)* These are a king's words.

1st GUARD *(Takes a step forward)* Who are you?

BEGGAR *(Smiling)* Can't you make out from my looks, Masters?

2nd GUARD *(Not moving)* Why are you here?

BEGGAR *(Humbly)* I'm a blind man, Master!

1st GUARD *(Arrogantly)* You may be blind; but can't you hear? *(Loudly)* Why are you here?

BEGGAR I'm a poor beggar.

2nd GUARD *(Interrupting)* That's why we're asking you--why are you near the King's palace?

BEGGAR *(Feigns surprise)* Why, Master? I thought I'll get some alms...

1st GUARD *(Coming down)* This is not the place for people like you. Get up! Go into the city, you may get something there.

BEGGAR I've come from there, Master.

2nd GUARD Why the hell have you come here?

BEGGAR *(Again in a pathetic voice)* Have pity on this blind man, Master. I went to all the houses in the city. They all said the same thing: 'The man of the house has gone to war. What can we give you? Go!'

1st GUARD *(Contemptuously)* Fool! And you've come here! Don't you know our King has also gone to war?

BEGGAR *(Nodding)* How can I not know, Master? It's being tom--tommed, everywhere. 'The king is going to war. Women should get ready to do the *aarti* to him.'

2nd GUARD *(Interrupting)* Hey! How does it concern you? The King is the master of the palace. He's not here. Get away!

1st GUARD *(laughing)* True! The man of this house has gone to war. Ha, ha!

BEGGAR But Master, even if the owner is not at home, there's always money in this house!

BOTH *(Surprised)* What did you say? *(Look at each other)*

1st GUARD Did you hear him?

2nd GUARD A pauper! And a beggar! He doesn't understand that a king doesn't have to work like the others.

1st GUARD *(Noticing the beggar is still sitting)* Hey, you! Are you still here?

2nd GUARD *(To Beggar)* What do you think this is? A temple? You're sitting as though you have a right to be here!

BEGGAR *(Curiously)* How did you know, Master?

2nd GUARD How do we know what?

BEGGAR That there was a temple...?

1st GUARD *(Laughing loudly)* Oh God! We've been telling you that this is not a temple!

BEGGAR *(Surprised)* Why, Master! There was a temple here earlier.

2nd GUARD *(With contempt)* And the only person who saw it was a blind man.

BEGGAR Earlier doesn't mean now...

1st GUARD *(Laughing loudly)* 'Earlier doesn't mean now'. Ha, ha, ha–'Earlier doesn't...' Ha, ha, ha!

BEGGAR *(Adamant and loud)* Not now means not in this age. 'Earlier' means an earlier age.

2nd GUARD *(With contempt)* Aha! I see! And is this written in history books or in the puranas?

BEGGAR *(Persisting)* There was a temple here; they destroyed it to build this palace and put a king here in place of God.

1st GUARD *(Angrily)* Here, go and tell this legend to the people in the town ; they might give you some alms.

BEGGAR *(Obstinately)* It's not a story, Masters, I know it. I was alive then.

2nd GUARD Alive? When?

1st GUARD *(To 2nd Guard)* He says he was living in an earlier age! Ha, ha! *(Both laugh)*

2nd GUARD *(Still laughing)* So you've been holding on to that life since then, have you? Ha, ha, ha! *(Laugh and tap their heads, suggesting he's crazy. Beggar shakes his head.)*

BEGGAR *(Pityingly)* The Masters don't believe me.

1st GUARD *(Mocking)* Oho! Of course, we believe you! Tell us, what else was there then?

BEGGAR *(Ignoring his mockery)* There were men and there were women, Masters; everything was like it is today. But as I told you, then there was God and now there's a king.

2nd GUARD *(Shows surprise)* You scoundrel! Do you think by saying that the King is God, you can please the King's guards?

From a distance, a woman's voice, pleading, 'Pandit--re, if you are really serious, you can save a poor woman's life!' Guards run to their places. The 1st Guard tells the Beggar, 'Look here! This is your Guru coming! Just shut your mouth and sit quietly; otherwise I'll thrash you'. Beggar asks, 'Who'? They say, 'Sshh'! Royal priest enters from the left, followed by a woman pleading. 'Save my family, Pandit--re! Save my home, I'll give you whatever you ask for'. The Pandit ignores her, goes to the steps, suddenly turns round and faces her. The woman, surprised, moves quickly to the left to avoid colliding with him and stands opposite him

COURT PRIEST *(Staring at her)* Will you give me what I ask? *(Laughs in contempt)* I'm the royal priest, I live under the King's patronage. Do you understand? *(Shes nods)* What do you understand?

WOMAN *(Bows humbly)* They say your word counts with the King. Everyone said you are the only person who can free my husband. *(Looking up)* That is why I beg of you, please save my husband.

COURT PRIEST Those who have gone to war will come back when it's over. What do you mean save him? If it's a defeat, they go to heaven instead of returning home. Do you know what happiness it is for a poor man to go to heaven and be free of his wife and children?

WOMAN *(Shaking her head)* My man has not gone to war, Panditre.

COURT PRIEST *(Taken aback)* Not gone to war? What an idiot he is! To die fighting for your king is to open a door to heaven. Yes, a door to heaven. Don't you know the Sastras say this?

WOMAN *(Sadly)* No Pandit-re, how will people like us know the Shastras? But I know my man has not gone to war.

COURT PRIEST *(Suspicious)* So, you don't even know where he's gone and you expect me to save him?

WOMAN Four people–they came from the palace- dragged him away. I don't know where they have taken him. That's why they all said you're the only person who can help.

COURT PRIEST Hmm! *(Thinks for a minute)* Is that so? *(Climbs two more steps and sits down)* Hmm! Sit there– a little farther–give me your hand- *(Suddenly)* If you sit so far, how will I see? Come closer–hmm–give me your hand... *(She stretches out her right hand)* Not that one- the Shastras say you must see a woman's left hand. *(She gives it to him)* Chee! Working people like you don't have any lines, may be they get worn out. That's why you have no futures- never mind come closer, give me your hand–here, put it in mine.

WOMAN *(Takes back her hand)* I feel shy, Pandit-re. *(Bites the edge of her pallu)*

COURT PRIEST Shy? Why, there's no one here. *(She looks at the Guards)* Oh, those men! If they see something they shouldn't, the King will gouge their eyes out. *(Just then he sees the beggar)* Here! Who are you?

WOMAN *(Turns round)* Oh! That poor man! He was born blind, he goes around begging.

COURT PRIEST Right, then it's okay. *(Moves to take her outstretched hand and suddenly stops. As if struck by a thought laughs loudly. She looks at him surprised)* Isn't it funny, the stupidity of humans! You want me to search for your husband, but you're scared to give me your hand.

WOMAN I've prayed to God to bring back my lord safe.

COURT PRIEST *(Nods appreciatively)* Good! That's the kind of devotion to your king you should have. But don't worry. Our king will be victorious and come back safe and sound.

WOMAN I wasn't speaking of the King, Pandit--re. What difference does it make to people like us whether he wins or loses! I was talking of my lord.

COURT PRIEST *(Surprised)* Your lord? Do you have another King?

WOMAN *(Smiling)* My king, the lord of my house, the master of my home.

COURT PRIEST *(Suddenly drawing away)* Oh! So you prayed to God for him?

WOMAN *(Proudly)* Yes, Pandit-re.

COURT PRIEST *(Suddenly lets go her hand)* Fools! *(Looking at her)* You don't know the Shastras at all!

WOMAN *(Hurt)* Aiyyo! How can people like us...?

COURT PRIEST *(Interrupting)* People like us? What do you mean? Why do you think the King has made me the court Pandit? It is to teach you people the shastras.

WOMAN You can teach me later, Pandit--re. But first, I beg of you, I must know that my husband is safe...

COURT PRIEST *(Again interrupts)* Why ask me? Haven't you prayed to God? Hasn't he told you?

WOMAN *(In a pitiful voice)* Don't get angry, Pandit--re. If I've done wrong, it's because I'm ignorant . And God is punishing me for it.

COURT PRIEST *(Annoyed)* There you go again! God neither punishes nor does he reward. It is this idea that God punishes after death which allows the wicked to flourish. That's why a king is better than God. If you do wrong, the king punishes at once and if you do good you are rewarded on the spot. Which is how our people are getting better.

WOMAN *(Surprised)* What are you saying, Pandit–re? I told you, it was some men from this palace who dragged my husband away...

COURT PRIEST *(Interrupts)* He must have done something wrong.

WOMAN *(Scared)* No, Pandit–re nothing like that.

COURT PRIEST *(Decisively)* He must have. The king understands what you and I can't. What do you think a king is? The Shastras say that a king has the qualities not of one or two, but of eight gods.

Indranilayamarkanam agnesca varunasya ca
Candra vittesayoscaiva matra nirhrtya sasvatihi

WOMAN *(Wanting to end the conversation)* When you tell me, how can I not understand, Pandit--re? But, even a king can be defeated. How can that...?

COURT PRIEST *(Surprised)* Defeated? Who told you about the King's defeat? *(Suddenly controls himself)* No, no–I mean, who spoke of such a thing?

WOMAN My husband.

COURT PRIEST *(Like a man who has the answer)* Right, now it's clear. That's why they took him away.

WOMAN *(Despairingly)* Does this mean you won't release him?

COURT PRIEST Rlease him? A person who tells such lies about the King...

WOMAN *(Interrupting)* He says not lies, Pandit–re.

COURT PRIEST Lies! Lies! If you speak of defeat without the King's permission, it's a lie. *(Gets up hurriedly)*

WOMAN I don't understand your Shastras. But people are talking, In fact, a group is marching this way...

COURT PRIEST *(Gets up)* This way? Towards the palace? *(She nods. To the guards)* Keep a strict guard. I'll go and warn the minister. *(Runs up two steps at a time. As he reaches the door, turns and tells guards)* Don't allow this woman to go. She must be part of that group. *(Goes in)*

The woman watches his exit uncomprehendingly. The guards stare at her. Complete silence for a moment.

WOMAN *(Looking at her palm)* Ayyo, didn't Panditappa say he was going to read my palm? *(Smiles to herself)* He said my palm has no lines. The way he ran--I wonder what lines he has on his feet! *(To guards who are watching her)* What is it? Did Panditappa tell you to stare at me? He only asked you to keep me here.

1st GUARD If you want to go, go right away. *(Looks at 2nd Guard)*

2nd GUARD If you don't, we'll be forced to keep you here. *(1st Guard nods at him)*

WOMAN You don't have to force me to stay; I'm not going away, either. There's a group of people coming this way. Let's see what happens. *(Goes to the Blind Man)* I'll sit here until then. *(Sits left of beggar, facing the spectators)* This is one man who doesn't stare at me lecherously.

BEGGAR Sister, are you laughing at a blind man?

WOMAN I'm not laughing, Tirukappa. I'm telling you what it is to be a woman. Didn't you see Panditappa's trick to hold my hand?

BEGGAR And you tricked him didn't you? *(Laughs heartily)*

WOMAN What's so funny, Tirukappa? Why are you laughing?

BEGGAR *(Controls his laughter)* When you said a group was coming here, he just scooted!

WOMAN It's true they're coming, Tirukappa. It's a large group--the men were shouting, the women were sobbing. They were

saying that the King has lost, that he's deserted his men and is sneaking back. *(The Guards look at each other)*

BEGGAR *(Taking a deep breath)* If this king goes, there'll be another. Our lives are our own. Why should we worry about the king?

WOMAN I'm not worrying about him. But look at how many lives he sacrificed before he destroyed himself!

BEGGAR He didn't sacrifice them, sister, they became victims themselves. All these years when he was successful, they made a hero of him, they cheered him. This time he lost and fled to save his life. Why didn't they do the same? Why did they have to go and die?

WOMAN You say strange things.

BEGGAR Never mind that, just tell me, sister, isn't it true? Look at me. I am blind, but I still hold on to life. And those people--they have eyes but they go and die!

WOMAN *(Laughs)* Do you mean nobody should die?

BEGGAR Die when death comes. What I say is, don't invite death.

WOMAN May be. But sometimes I feel all these things--kings and gods--are false.

BEGGAR *(Laughs)* You'll be happy only when you believe lies, sister.

WOMAN Oh, come on! Don't say such things.

BEGGAR If you believe that a person who's born must die, what fun is there in living?

WOMAN *(Annoyed)* Do you mean life is a lie?

BEGGAR I don't know. I'm a blind man. I myself don't know how I've lived all these years.

Voices from a distance 'Let's knock down the palace walls. Let's see who can stop us. We will demand an answer from the King.'

WOMAN *(Enthusiastically)* Look! You didn't believe me, did you? Can you hear them shouting now?

BEGGAR *(Dejected)* Yes, I hear them.

WOMAN *(Laughs)* Why are you scared? They won't harm people like us.

BEGGAR I'm not scared, sister. And they won't harm anyone, let alone people like us.

(The voices come closer) God help us! *(Takes a deep breath)*

WOMAN *(Get up)* Do you think God will help us, or the King, as Panditappa's Shastras say? One of the two, anyway.

BEGGAR Why only two, sister? There are any number of gods and kings. *(Voices: 'Now wait! Listen to us!' Gradually the voices become fainter. One voice: 'Let one person go ahead'. Many voices: 'You go on, you go ahead'. The first voice (The Rebel), says 'Okay, I'll go ahead', enters the stage and looks around. 'You can surround the place' he says and approaches the steps. The others enter saying, 'Don't worry about them', and 'Let's see who has the guts to touch you', 'We are behind you', 'You only have to tell us to push ahead'. They stand in a semicircle around the steps. The Rebel sees the Guards at the main door. The guards wordlessly go to the door and stand before it, their weapons ready. The Rebel looks at his followers for their reaction.)*

ONE If the door can be closed, it can also be opened.

A SECOND ONE Look! Those two puppets have something in their hands.

A THIRD ONE They're showing us they know how to hold them, man!

ONE They've run away from defeat and now they stand here like heroes!

REBEL *(Warning)* Those who are scared can still go back- there's no pressure on anyone.

ANOTHER ONE *(To Guards)* Hey! Did you hear that? If you want to close the door, go in and close it.

REBEL *(Facing the group)* Remember–We've come to see the King!

ANOTHER ONE *(To others)* And mind, we're not going to applaud him!

REBEL *(Raising his hand to stop their laughter)* To see the King and talk to him.

ONE Poor chap! He's been running. Let him get his breath first. Then you can talk to him.

REBEL *(Can't help smiling)* It's not only to speak to him. We want to make it clear that we wont bear it any longer. *(Cheers, cries of jubilation: 'Come on', 'That's the spirit)'* There are more people in his kingdom who are dying for him than people living for their own selves. We slogged, he enjoyed; we earned, he took it all. We ask for work and he calls us rebels. And when people starve to death, he says why don't they work!

Mother's voice: 'I'll tell more, let me go, I want to go to him'. People try to stop her but she goes on and climbs the steps. Rebel stops her. Her hair is dishevelled, the pallu of her sari is tied round the waist. She looks both helpless and cruel

REBEL *(Consoling her, makes her face the group)* Tell them whatever you have to say, tell me. You are like our mother. When we're alive, why should you do these things?

MOTHER *(Tears pouring from her eyes)* What shall I say? Is there anyone here who's seen the King? I've seen him. He's a useless old man who should have died long back. He thinks he can escape death if he lets others die! I lost my husband, I lost my only son because of him. If you let him go on like this, there won't be a single young person alive. *(Raising her voice)* He shouldn't be allowed to live, he should be killed, he should be chopped into pieces and thrown...

She shakes off the Rebel and goes ahead. The Rebel stops her. The guards come nearer. The Rebel, closely watching the guards, raises his hand in order to restrain the crowd. Immediate silence. The Rebel stares at the guards. The mother overcome with emotions is almost collapsing. The Rebel brings her down the steps. When she comes down, she collapses

on the step. The Rebel looks at her for w moment and climbs up one step...

Rebel *(To Guards)* Here, put away those things! *(There is no response from them)* I said put them away! We haven't come here to fight. *(They step back)* If we wanted to fight, there are enough men here to throw you out. *(They stand as before with their weapons)* We don't expect to push our way in. We only want to see your king. If he comes, we'll talk to him right here and go away. If he doesn't, we'll have to force our way in. So, What do you want to do?

1st GUARD If you wait quietly, we'll send a message that you are here.

REBEL *(With contempt)* There's no need to send a message. This noise can be heard...

ONE May be it scared him and he's hiding?

All laugh. The door opens from inside. The Minister comes out

MINISTER His subjects-' voices are like a magnet; they draw the King to them. *(The guards stand in the correct postures.)*

MOTHER *(Turns to him)* This is not the King. We want to see the King. You are not the King.

MINISTER *(Calmly)* Be calm, Mother, I am not the King. But I am the Minister, I take on all the King's responsibilities.

REBEL Oh! So, you're the one who makes that man who calls himself the King play these games, do you?

MINISTER *(Smiling)* It's not I who do it; it's the King's wishes that make me play the game.

REBEL In that case, we want to know what the King's wishes are.

MINISTER I can tell you that.

ANOTHER ONE Who are you?

MINISTER When you have the Minister before you, why trouble the King?

YET ANOTHER ONE Is your lord exhausted by his flight from defeat?

MINISTER Who's that? Beware! Don't speak against the King!

REBEL *(Raises his hand to restrain the protesting restless crowd. To Minister)* Your King's self--indulgence is making us lose our control. Don't provoke people. We want to see him. He must come out himself. Or else... *(Stops)*

MINISTER Or else what?

REBEL What else? We'll force our way in. *(Loudly)* That's definite.

MINISTER *(Staring at him)* That's stupid talk. I think you've really lost control.

ONE *(Angrily)* Hey! Whom are you calling stupid? Did you hear him?

REBEL *(To the group)* Shut up. I'm here, I'll deal with it.

MINISTER *(His ego pricked)* Oppression, they say. Oppression! Can you show me just one act of injustice?

REBEL *(With hatred)* No need for that. It's right here before your eyes. Look at those emaciated skeletons! That's because you make them pay for your constant wars. And look at all those poor women who've lost their children and husbands in your games of death. *(Mother beats her chest to suggest she is one of them)*

MINISTER *(Calmly)* It is the subjects-' duty to pay taxes and become soldiers.

REBEL *(With contempt)* And is it the King's duty to squeeze the life out of his subjects?

MINISTER I haven't come here to argue. If you have any problems, tell me. I'll place them before the King.

ONE Who wants to talk to you? Didn't we ask for the King?

MINISTER *(Stares at them for a moment, then shakes his head)* That's not possible. First tell me what you want and what you don't want. Then..

ONE We want happiness...

ANOTHER ONE We don't want a king...

YET ANOTHER ONE We want a palace too..

ONE VOICE We want gold and silver...

ANOTHER VOICE We want grand clothes...

YET ANOTHER VOICE We don't want to slog, we want money...

A NEW VOICE We...

The commotion increases in spite of the Rebel restraining them. The Minister smiles. The Rebel, angry now, comes down hastily and says, 'Will you shut up?' He stands before them.

REBEL Take what you want. I'm going. *(He seems ready to go. There is a sudden silence. Some people stop him saying 'We are sorry', 'You speak for us.' He gives them an angry look and turning to the Minister)* We won't say a word in your presence. Go, bring your king out to me.

MINISTER *(With a smile)* What's the hurry? You're not the only one here. There are plenty of others--and they all want something.

REBEL You have nothing to do with them. Just go. I know what they want and I'll speak on their behalf. But not to you and not in your presence. *(To crowd)* Do you all agree? *(Cries of, 'Yes, we do')*

MOTHER I have nothing to say to anyone. I want that butcher's life in place of the two I lost, I want revenge.

MINISTER *(To Rebel)* I know that it's because of this that you need a king.

VOICES We don't want a king. We can live by ourselves. We don't want anyone ruling over us.

MINISTER You people--You're always wanting what others have, you're always grabbing each other's things, you scoundrels exploit the weak! You need a king. You said so yourselves, you gave him the power...

REBEL If we put him up there, we can bring him down as well.

MINISTER *(Shaking his head)* But... *(Pointing to the rest)* Who'll give them what they want?

REBEL *(Interrupting)* We don't want anything. And we don't need your cunning tricks to make a rift between us, either. Go away.

MINISTER *(Shows surprise)* Creating a rift? I? Haven't they been asking for things right from the beginning?

VOICES We want nothing from you.

MINISTER *(Again surprised)* Really? Have you become *sanyasis*?

REBEL *(To the crowd)* Didn't I tell you we should have one leader?

SOME VOICES Haven't we made you our leader?

REBEL *(In sudden anger)* Then stop interfering! Why do you talk to him? I ask you again--will you listen to me? *(Loud cry of, 'Yes, we will')* Will you do as I say? *(Again loud 'Yes, we will)* Will you promise me that you will not retreat? *(Shouts of 'We promise'. Satisifed that it is his victory, he looks intently at the Minister and climbs up the steps. The Guards watch the Rebel. The crowd waits with bated breath, The Rebel stares at the Minister as he climbs the steps one by one. The Minister keeps an eye on the Rebel as he makes signals to the Guards to be watchful. The Minister does not move)* If I lose my patience, it's not good for you. Go and bring your king here. *(The door opens and the Court Priest steps out. Everybody notices him. The mood changes. The Court Priest slowly comes out and stands before the Minister)*

COURT PRIEST *(Looking at everyone)* That's what I've come to tell you. The King has graciously agreed to give you an audience. You can present your problems to him...

ONE Listen men, the King is coming! *(The Court Priest, scared, stops)*

MINISTER *(To Court Priest)* As his majesty commands. *(Exits, with one look at the people and one at the Guards...)*

REBEL *(Points to the people)* They are my responsibility. Don't be scared. *(Minister smiles; he is not worried any more.)*

MINISTER *(To the Court Priest)* Did you hear? They are the King's subjects, they're decent men. You don't need to be scared. *(Exits)*

The Court Priest looks at the Rebel. Realising that he is staring back, he looks at others

COURT PRIEST *(Determined to start a dialogue)* Why are you standing? Why don't you sit down? The King may take some time to arrive. Sit down. *(They are silent. He laughs nervously)* Oho! I'm standing myself? You won't sit down until I do. So there! *(Sits on the highest step)*

ONE *(To others)* Who is this creature?

WOMAN He looks into your palm and tells you your future.

They look at her in surprise; they are hearing her voice for the first time

COURT PRIEST *(Hastily, to cover up the woman's statement)* Sit down. You can stand up when the King arrives.

YET ANOTHER ONE *(Struck by an idea)* I say, let's sit down.

ANOTHER ONE *(Suspiciously)* Why, man?

YET ANOTHER ONE When the King comes we can show him that we don't get up for him.

All except Rebel, cry out, 'Well said', and 'Bravo' and sit down.

REBEL *(Approaching the woman)* You've been sitting here for a long time, haven't you?

BEGGAR She's protecting me.

REBEL Why? Is she afraid the Blind Man will run away?

They laugh. Rebel sits to Beggar's left

COURT PRIEST *(To others, with a sly smile)* So you won't get up when the King comes! Ha, ha! You know, sometimes when

you sit for long, your legs go numb. *(As though letting them into a secret)* But I'll tell you something. When the king comes you will automatically stand up. That's how radiant his presence is.

ONE Your king ran away after defeat. His radiance will be masked.

(They laugh)

BEGGAR *(To Rebel)* She's protecting this blind man exactly because he can't run away.

REBEL What? Did anyone-- these guards- try to hurt you?

WOMAN Aiyyo! Who'd do that? And anyway, everyone's hands were occupied. These two were holding something and Panditappa was holding my hand....

REBEL *(Angrily)* What?

WOMAN *(With contempt)* May be he was searching for the lines on my palm. And...

The Beggar laughs, the Rebel, knowing he was hasty, laughs as well.

COURT PRIEST *(To others)* May be you people don't know that his radiance can never decrease? He was born with it.

YET ANOTHER ONE Did your lord become a king the moment he was born?

COURT PRIEST *(Seriously)* Of course! There is no doubt about it.

ANOTHER ONE So let's say the throne itself has a womb. That's where he came from.

YET ANOTHER ONE Where was this womb? Above the throne or below it?

Laughter

REBEL *(To Woman)* Let him look at the lines of his own hand instead of looking at yours.

BEGGAR When we heard these people shouting, we never thought they could laugh like this.

WOMAN *(Suddenly provoked)* Of course they laugh! That's the way men are! The moment they go out, they forget their families.

REBEL *(To Woman)* You're taking out your anger against your husband on all men, aren't you?

All laugh. The Woman can't help smiling

ONE *(To Court Priest)* Have you seen the throne's lines, Panditappa?

YET ANOTHER ONE What lines? That throne doesn't even have feet!

COURT PRIEST *(Covering his ears) Shantam papam! Shantam papam!*

They laugh

BEGGAR Sister, this may make you angry, but I must say that I'm more frightened of that woman than anyone else here...

WOMAN *(Sympathetically)* Poor Woman! She's gone crazy after losing everything.

BEGGAR That's what scares me.

REBEL *(To Woman)* Heard that? *(To Beggar)* Don't worry blind man. You yourself said she's protecting you.

The other three laugh. Beggar smiles sadly

ANOTHER ONE *(Suddenly angry)* Hey, Panditappa! Where have you seen sin?

YET ANOTHER ONE *(Angrily)* Exactly! The King was born a king, he says. And this man, who gets his bread and butter from the King, is trying to teach us!

COURT PRIEST *(Cautiously)* No, no. I have to tell you because you may not know that our Shastras say it's a sin to criticise a King.

ONE *(Stubbornly)* And our Shastras tell us we don't want this King.

The Rebel looks at him as he says this

COURT PRIEST *(Forcing a smile)* Ask whatever it is you've come to ask. He will be compassionate. Who but the King...

MOTHER *(Gnashing her teeth)* I want my husband, I want my son. *(Suddenly she turns to Court Priest, beats her forehead and cries sorrowfully)* I want my husband, I want my son.

The Rebel quickly comes to her and holds her hands.

REBEL He can't do it, Mother. Leave it to me. *(She becomes quiet, he stands up and faces Priest)* Who asked you to speak? *(Thunders)* With what authority do you say these things?

COURT PRIEST *(Scared)* I have no authority of my own. When the King made me the Court Pandit, he put me in charge of this work...

REBEL What work? Making up false Shastras and deceiving the people?

COURT PRIEST *(Feigns courage)* The Shastras can never be wrong.

REBEL *(Thundering voice)* What Shastras? That one man is born a king and the others are born to be his slaves?

COURT PRIEST *(Still putting on an act of being brave)* That is not Shastra; that is God's own rule.

WOMAN *(Confidentially, to Beggar)* Didn't you hear him say that the Shastras are true, but God is false?

BEGGAR *(In the same tone)* God is used more to scare others than to protect oneself, sister.

REBEL *(To Court Priest)* Oh! You've done with the King, now you're on to God's story, are you? *(Climbs up one more step)*

COURT PRIEST *(Scared, then recovering)* It's not a story. The King's story is not over.

(Looks at the door and suddenly gets up) Oh! My Lord! *(Turns around and tells everyone to get up)* My Lord! My Lord! *(Nobody gets up. Mother turns back to look at him)*

The Guards stand to attention. They are all looking at the door. Mother seeing that no one is noticing her, climbs up the steps on her

knees. The Minister appears first. Holding on to his right shoulder is the King. The King is enormously obese, dressed ostentatiously and with many ornaments. He moves slowly, like an inanimate object. As he comes to the middle of the steps...

MOTHER The man who murdered my son and husband is here. He's the man... *(She raises her hand and rushes towards him. The people are taken by surprise but she reaches the King and raises her hand. The Rebel saying 'hey, hey' tries to hold her. Before her hand comes down, the stage becomes dark. First the shouts of the crowd, then a cry from the King and finally the screams of the Mother are heard. Gradually there is a complete silence on the stage)*

After a few seconds, suggesting passage of time, lights gradually come on the stage-but only on the Beggar and on the Woman. The Woman has covered her face with her hands. The Beggar not hearing any sounds gropes about. Finally he touches the woman's leg. He draws back his hand and is about to sit

WOMAN *(Screams in fear)* Oh God, I'm dying! *(Slowly uncovers her face)* Who's that?

As if trying to avoid a blow, she opens her eyes

BEGGAR *(Soothing her)* Sister, why are you so scared?

WOMAN *(Taking deep breaths)* I thought someone was dragging me by my feet...

BEGGAR *(Smiling)* Ha, ha! That was me Sister. I was searching with my hands. It was quiet for so long, I wondered what had happened, where everybody had gone, whether you're still here. I would have used my stick, but I thought it might hurt you and scare you. So I used my hand...

WOMAN I'd closed my eyes.

BEGGAR *(Listening intently)* What's this? There's no one here! Where are they? What happened, Sister?

WOMAN I can't bear to think of it.

BEGGAR *(Softly)* But there's no one here. Did the King's men drive them out?

WOMAN Who? The people? The guards were the first to run away. The Minister was close behind.

BEGGAR Is that why the people were celebrating?

WOMAN They were not people, Tirukappa.

BEGGAR Then who were they?

WOMAN What do I say, Blind Man? How do I tell you? If you'd seen it, you'd have understood. The mob sprang up like tigers. If you had just seen their faces as they used their sticks- oh God! They looked like devils.

BEGGAR Poor thing! May be the King screamed because they abandoned him? It was the King who screamed, wasn't it? *(The Woman does not reply)* Did someone else scream?

WOMAN Let's not think of that now, Tirukappa.

BEGGAR Why, Sister? What happened?

WOMAN *(Short of breath)* Two lives lost.

BEGGAR *(Surprised)* Two lives?

WOMAN *(Ignoring him)* That woman leapt up and stabbed the king and then the guards tore her open with their spears. Before you could say a word, two people were dead.

BEGGAR So many people around--did no one stop them?

WOMAN Who'd stop them? The crowd didn't want to rise for the King. And the Minister fled because his only thought was to save himself. Before we realised it, it was all over. *(Sounds of heavy objects falling from back stage)*

BEGGAR *(Alarmed)* What was that?

WOMAN *(Hurriedly)* I think they're here. Get up, Blind Man, the people have gone mad, they're destroying the palace. Up! Get up!

BEGGAR *(Holding the stick she gives him)* Forget about me, Sister. You better escape.

WOMAN *(Guides him to the right of the audience.)* You're lucky, Tirukappa. Your blindness saved you from seeing such sights.

BEGGAR *(Still walking)* Even sightless eyes can shed tears, Sister. *(Wipes his eyes)*

WOMAN Why is the Blind Man crying?

BEGGAR I'm crying for people who can see, Sister, but make the same mistakes over and over again.

Both exit

The Second Door is Closed

THE THIRD DOOR

Complete darkness for just a minute after the two characters exit at the end of the last Act. Sounds of things falling and breaking, of shouts and whistles gradually fade away while the lights come on; only whistles can be heard. No walls or doors now. Workers, whistling while they work, are arranging chairs before a raised platform. The workers look at their work, nod in satisfaction and get up for some respite. One worker claps his hands to attract the others' attention, proudly climbs the steps, stands at the top and looks around seriously

1st WORKER *(Addressing an imaginary audience)* Mothers, Elders, Brothers and Sisters...

2nd WORKER *(Scared)* Hey! Get down from there! Come down, man.

1st WORKER *(Even more scared)* Why? Who's come?

2nd WORKER *(In the same tone)* No one. But you better get down before somebody comes.

3rd WORKER *(Angrily)* Come down man! Have you no shame?

1st WORKER *(Surprised)* Hey! Why are you so angry?

3rd WORKER *(As before)* What do you mean? Do you think you are fit even to kneel here?

2nd WORKER Never mind that. Come down first.

1st WORKER *(To 3rd Worker)* What's wrong with me? Don't our leaders say that we're all equal now?

3rd WORKER They're being generous. Yes, they say it and we listen to them. But you should know your place.

2nd WORKER *(To 1st Worker)* If you want to argue, come down and do it. The policeman will shoot you if he sees you standing there.

1st WORKER *(Without moving, to 3rd Worker)* Listen! They're putting up a statue here. Am I less than a stone image?

3[rd] WORKER Stone image? May be, but it's our leader's statue.

1[st] WORKER *(Irritated)* Stop it, man! Why are you going on and on about leaders?

2[nd] WORKER Sshh! Speak softly. Even the wind carries tales these days.

3[rd] WORKER *(Angry)* Do you think I'm a tale carrier?

2[nd] WORKER The wind, I said the wind carries tales.

3[rd] WORKER *(Arguing)* What do you think our leaders are?

2[nd] WORKER *(In surprise)* What a stupid question!

3[rd] WORKER *(Still arguing)* Don't try to slip out of it. I'm asking you--what do you think they are?

1[st] WORKER What else? To us they're like God. Does it have to be said?

2[nd] WORKER Hmm! That's what I'm saying. Because of our leaders, we have enough to eat.

1[st] WORKER And every day. A meeting here today, a speech tomorrow, a function somewhere, else the day after- so it goes on.

2[nd] WORKER So we have work every day--build a platform, erect an arch, put up banners...

1[st] WORKER And we eat.

3[rd] WORKER *(Doubtfully)* Let it be! But they are big people... *(To 1[st] Worker)* While you! *(Angrily)* Come down immediately!

1[st] WORKER Get away man! I thought since we've finished our work, we would have some fun. *(Muttering to himself, he descends, taking two steps at a time) (Rhythmic shouts of 'Hey, hey! Ho ho! from a distance)*

3[rd] WORKER *(Looking in the direction of the sound)* Looks like they've brought it.

1[st]&2[nd] WORKERS What is it? *(Looking in the same direction)*

3rd WORKER *(Happily)* Our leader's statue.

1st WORKER Oh! That stone doll! *(2nd Worker nudges him with his elbow to silence him. The 3rd Worker glares at them)*

Four people dressed uniformly in Khadi and chanting rhythmically enter carrying a heavy statue covered in sacking material. In their hurry to unload it, they drop it near the steps. They wipe their sweat

1st HELPER *(Looking at the statue)* Damn you! You've gone and done it!

2nd HELPER *(Scared)* Why? Has it broken?

3rd HELPER Break? Not it. It'll break our backs.

4th HELPER *(To 1st Helper)* Why did you stop? What's wrong?

1st HELPER We shouldn't have let it lie like that.

4th HELPER That's true. We should have kept it upright.

3rd HELPER *(Looking at the Workers)* May be if we ask these people they'll give us a hand.

3rd WORKER *(Enthusiastically)* Why not? But my hands are dirty. I'll wash them with soap. *(Goes in and comes out running)* Don't lift it until I come, I'll be back in a minute. *(Runs in and comes out)* And I'll get a garland for it. *(Runs in)*

1st HELPER *(Looking at him)* Hey, it won't be unveiled till tomorrow. Who's the garland for?

3rd HELPER *(Looking at the other two workers)* For your friend *(Taps his head, as if saying, 'is he crazy?')*

2nd WORKER *(Laughing)* He thinks the leader is God.

4th HELPER He must have got some *prasad!*

1st WORKER Is this stone--and so heavy?

2nd HELPER *(Surprised)* Stone? *(Laughs heartily)*

3rd HELPER It's not stone, man, it's steel.

2nd HELPER And it's not hollow, either. They must have made it of steel to show how weighty he is.

1[st] WORKER Didn't you say it won't be unveiled till tomorrow?

3[rd] HELPER *(Still wiping his sweat)* Yes, man. The curtains of this drama will go up only tomorrow.

1[st] WORKER *(To 2[nd] Worker)* Then why have they asked us to arrange the chairs today?

4[th] HELPER May be another function...

1[st] HELPER No scarcity of words.

1[st] WORKER If it's tomorrow, we can leave it as it is. Come, let's have a drink. *(Goes out)*

2[nd] HELPER *(Shouts after them)* You're coming back, I hope?

1[st] WORKER *(Turning back)* Of course. If there's a function, we have to be there.

2[nd] WORKER We'll tell him we don't need a garland today. *(Exits)*

3[rd] HELPER Sure, they will come! And you will be there to see them.

2[nd] HELPER Didn't they say that they're present at every function?

4[th] HELPER They'll be back by then, after having a drink! *(Gestures suggesting drinking alcohol. All except 2[nd] Helper, laugh)*

1[st] HELPER *(Looking around)* We must do something about this. *(Points to the sack)* People will soon be coming in.

3[rd] HELPER Okay, but let's have a smoke first. *(He sits on the lower step to the left)*

2[nd] HELPER Here, throw me one! *(Sits on his right)*

3[rd] HELPER *(Takes a deep breath and sits left of 3[rd] Helper)* Hm.

1[st] HELPER Right. May be someone will come by then. *(Sits on the step facing spectators, hand stretched out for a beedi. In surprise)* Hey, why is he coming here? *(Others mutely ask, 'Who?')* Don't you know this fellow's story?

3[rd] HELPER So many beggars in town. Who knows their stories?

1[st] HELPER He's not an ordinary beggar. You know what they call him? Tirukappa of past ages! Ha, ha!

4[th] HELPER What has he to do with the past?

1[st] HELPER I'll speak to him, just listen to his strange talk!

3[rd] HELPER Yes, but what has he to do with the past?

1[st] HELPER He's always talking of those times. And not like it's a story, but as if he was alive then.

4[th] HELPER Must be a crazy fellow.

1[st] HELPER But still... You know what they say--that those with eyes can see only what's before them but those without can see things in front, behind, inside outside--everything!

3[rd] HELPER Looks like you're going crazy as well. Um? *(1[st] Helper says, Sssh. Blind Beggar enters slowly with the support of a stick)*

1[st] HELPER Wait, blind man, there's something in the way. *(Beggar feels the sack with his stick and carefully steps across)*

3[rd] HELPER Why have you taken the trouble to come here, blind man?

BEGGAR Wasn't there a palace here, Masters?

4[th] HELPER *(Surprised)* Palace? Why? Have they invited you? *(Laughs)*

2[nd] HELPER A palace is the king's home, do you know that?

BEGGAR A king or a servant- they're the same to a blind man, Masters.

3[rd] HELPER Hello! He's lecturing like our leaders.

BEGGAR Leaders? And who are they, Master?

4[th] HELPER The thing you just stepped over--that's him--I mean, his statue.

BEGGAR *(Takes a deep breath and goes to his usual place)* Hmm! Seems to have become a habit.

3[rd] HELPER *(Laughing)* What habit, Tirukappa?

BEGGAR Putting up statues and bringing them down. *(Sits down)*

2nd HELPER Why is he sitting here?

BEGGAR *(Smiling)* I sat right here in earlier times, Masters! At that time, *(pointing)* there was a palace there.

4th HELPER Looks like you've yet to come into this world. Ha ha. There are no kings today.

1st HELPER *(Getting up)* But we have leaders. Come on, get up, it's almost time for the function. Let's put this against the steps. *(Others get up reluctantly. Chanting, they place the statue against the steps)* Blind man, there's going to be a big meeting here. There'll be crowds, much pushing and shoving. Be careful. Let's go!

As he makes his exit, he warns the Beggar that if he does not leave he will have to be ready for his next birth. They laugh loudly. From now on, people keep coming for the meeting. Some stand, some sit on chairs, then move away but nobody talks.

Total silence for a while.

Among the people is a flower seller, a basket of flowers on her head. When she enters one of the two young men present notices her, clears his throat and prods the person next to him. She enters from right, goes to the Beggar. With a sigh of relief she puts the basket on the ground and sits to his left. The Young Man looks at her off and on and seems to be talking about her to his friend

BEGGAR Who's there?

FLOWER GIRL It's me, blind man! They said there's a meeting here, so I've come to sell garlands.

BEGGAR *(Smiling)* The meeting place has become a temple!

FLOWER GIRL Oh! What's a temple compared to this! No number of garlands are enough here! *(Smiles)* But I've learnt a trick or two in my business!

ONE PERSON Here, give me one garland, woman. How much is it?

FLOWER GIRL One Rupee, Sir. *(Gives him one)*

BEGGAR Is it because he's your first customer--you've given it for a rupee!

FLOWER GIRL It's a rupee for anyone who comes first.

BEGGAR *(Smiling)* And two rupees for those who come later?

FLOWER GIRL No, blind man! It's not for the person who comes first, it's for those who come for the first time. I'll sell it for 10 paise less for those who come later.

BEGGAR What kind of arithemetic is this, sister?

FLOWER GIRL *(As though letting him into a secret)* You're blind, Tirukappa, or I'd have shown you the fun. *(Even more secretive)* See, all my flowers will be sold before the meeting starts. But I never let them see the my basket is empty. Once they start garlanding, my business gets going.

BEGGAR *(Shaking his head)* Forget it! I don't understand.

FLOWER GIRL *(Persistent, in low tones)* Let me explain. Those who've garlanded remove the garlands and they come back to me. I buy them for 10 paise and sell them for a rupee. That makes it 90 paise for a garland, doesn't it?

BEGGAR *(Smiling)* You're a smart one, sister!

FLOWER GIRL How can I live by just selling flowers, Tirukappa? If you are honest you don't earn a paise. Look at you, now. If you don't open your mouth, nobody will know you are blind!

BEGGAR Isn't there a law that punishes begging?

FLOWER GIRL Damn their laws! There was a time when giving alms to the blind and the lame was our dharma; now the law says don't give it! Oh! People have started coming.

Note: Throughout people buy flowers but the conversation goes on. The Young Man goes to the flower girl and sits on her right

YOUNG MAN Give me one garland. The flowers should be fresh--like you.

FLOWER GIRL *(Stopping him)* What did you say?

YOUTH *(Grinning)* I said they should be fresh--and soft and tender.

FLOWER GIRL Take this! Now run home before it gets dark or your mother will give you a good beating! *(She gives him the garland. He gives her a 5 rupee note and is about to get up)* Take your change. Haven't you been to school?

YOUTH *(Confidentially)* Keep it. After the meeting is over...

FLOWER GIRL *(She throws the money at him)* Go to hell! *(He takes the money and hurries away. Friend laughs. Youth pretends to be talking to the Flower girl, smiles at her)*

FLOWER GIRL *(To Beggar)* Just look at these young men!

BEGGAR *(Taking a deep breath)* It's their world.

FLOWER GIRL *(Offended)* Forget them, blind man! The milk has not yet dried on his lips, and he has the leaders lecturing to him! He seems to think there's no difference between his wife and others' wives.

Beggar laughs

A Policeman enters from the right waving his baton arrogantly. He looks all around. He comes to the Flower Girl, stands opposite her and kicks her basket

POLICEMAN What's in this?

FLOWER GIRL *(Having seen him, she has already taken out some garlands. She stands before him)* Flowers and garlands, Sipahiappa...

POLICEMAN You're sure there's nothing else?

FLOWER GIRL There's the basket.

POLICEMAN *(Pointing to the Blind Man, imitating her voice)* And there's 'this' too...

FLOWER GIRL Poor chap! He was born blind...

POLICEMAN *(Interrupting)* But he can hear, can't he? *(Flower Girl and Beggar nod)* All of you should listen carefully to the leader's speech. Or else.. *(Waves his baton and goes to the right. As he goes*

to the edge of the stage, a stranger enters and is about to collide with the Policeman)

POLICEMAN Hey! Where are your eyes? *(Stranger looks at Policeman questioningly. Policeman nods. The stranger follows him, hands folded as though he is scared of him)*

A well dressed elderly person followed by an ordinary looking gentleman enters from the right. As soon as the elderly person enters, people greet him with a namaste

POLICEMAN No noise. *(To people standing)* Why are you standing with your hands folded? *(Exits)*

GENTLEMAN *(To the elder person)* The police don't want anyone to show you respect.

ELDER They're doing their job.

GENTLEMAN *(Confidentially)* It wasn't like this in your days.

ELDER *(With a smile)* In our days we never knew what people really wanted. *(He looks around for a place to sit. The Gentleman does the same).*

FLOWER GIRL *(Looking down, softly)* Tirukappa, the old Gentleman who just came in--there are few as good as him in this world.

BEGGAR *(In the same tone)* What does he do, Sister?

FLOWER GIRL *(Softly)* He was our leader once.

BEGGAR *(Softly)* And now?

FLOWER GIRL Wait, I think I have a customer.

The stranger re-enters and collides with the gentleman. He apologizes with a namaste and comes to the Flower girl

GENTLEMAN *(Irritably)* Who is this man? Why is he hovering about us?

ELDER *(With a gentle smile)* It's a public meeting, people are free to come and go.

GENTLEMAN When I came in, he was talking to you. What was he giving you?

ELDER *(Laughing)* Crazy man! He came to give me some flowers.

GENTLEMAN *(Surprised)* Flowers?

ELDER *(Still laughing)* He said, 'we can't garland someone like you, that's why I've brought flowers' and gave me the flowers.

GENTLEMAN *(Laughs)* Isn't it strange? People still admire you. Anyway, you took the flowers!

ELDER *(Shaking his head)* Poor chap! I told him to take the flowers home to his wife. Let her wear them. Why give them to this old man? I returned them to him.

GENTLEMAN So, that's what you were giving him! *(Suddenly stops)* Please take this seat, Sir. *(He dusts a chair in the front row, near the steps to the right and arranges a chair for himself in the back row)*

STRANGER *(To Flower Girl)* That gentleman asked me to give you these flowers.

FLOWER GIRL *(Surprised)* He did? Why me?

STRANGER *(Interrupting)* Someone gave them to him. He said, 'Where do I keep these? Give them to the Flower Girl. She'll make garlands'.

FLOWER GIRL *(To the Beggar)* See, Tirukappa, how generous he is? *(To Stranger)* My hands are not free. Drop them in my basket yourself. *(He does so)* What's that? Stones? I heard a sound.

STRANGER *(Laughing)* Ha! My rings touched your basket. *(Smiling, he shows her his rings and exits from right)*

FLOWER GIRL *(Muttering to herself)* Wonder if His Lordship came here to show off his rings. *(Beggar laughs)*

The Youth and his friend now come to the back row of chairs on the right, looking for seats.

YOUTH *(Seeing Elder and Gentleman seated, to friend)* Why don't we sit on chairs?

FRIEND *(Contemptuously)* Sit on chairs like old men?

YOUTH *(Angrily)* What do you mean? Is it only old men who have the right to sit on chairs?

FRIEND Who's talking of rights? If you sit on a chair, you'll have to stay till the very end! I can't do it!

YOUTH I find it boring to stand in one place!

FRIEND *(In surprise)* Have you come to listen to his speech?

YOUTH Who wants to hear it? We've heard it so often!

FRIEND Then, why do you want to stand? Let's move about. If there's anything interesting to see, we'll...

YOUTH *(Interrupting)* What's the point in just watching? *(suddenly)* If you agree to what I'm going to say, I'll walk with you.

FRIEND What is it?

YOUTH *(Comes near, in a confidential tone)* Look, Let's go right behind these people. No, let us walk about here- or no, let's go there, but a little away.

FRIEND *(Suspiciously)* And then? How will we see anything interesting from that far?

YOUTH *(Bored voice)* What will you see, anyway? Once it's dark, you can't even see whether it's a man or a woman.

FRIEND Then why hang around?

YOUTH *(Still more secretive)* Shall I tell you? Let's throw some stones.

FRIEND What! We may hurt someone...

YOUTH *(Interrupting)* So? We're not aiming at anyone. And what if someone gets hurt? None of our family or friends are here.

FRIEND *(Disgusted)* Then what's the point?

YOUTH Don't you see? The idea that--I--I alone can frighten everyone here... *(Lowers his voice)* The Policeman is coming. Let's talk of something else.

Policeman enters. 'Sit straight Sir', he says to the gentleman who is talking to the Elder. The Young man asks his friends to take their seats, walks away without expecting replies. Goes to Flower Girl and asks, 'So, haven't you sold out your flowers as yet?' 'He sent me some more', she says, but he doesn't pay any attention to her. The Gentleman is still engrossed in his talk; Youth and Friend are moving backstage. The Stranger comes forward, The Policeman asks him something. Stranger nods as if confirming something and goes away. Policeman exits from right. Gentleman wtaches him go

GENTLEMAN What I say is--you're an older man, tell me, do you think that people should behave like sheep?

ELDER It's human nature. No point arguing about it.

GENTLEMAN *(Shows surprise)* What? Do you mean people should imitate one another like sheep? We should go 'baa baa' because someone says 'baa baa'?

ELDER *(Laughing)* We were born with this habit of aping one another.

GENTLEMAN *(Annoyed)* Shouldn't we have our own ideas even when we grow up? Shouldn't we have our own minds?

ELDER Listen! When we were kids, they told us 'If you obey your elders you go to heaven'. At home, our parents were our elders, these leaders are the elders in society.

GENTLEMAN *(Moves back a little and stares at him)* You say this now. You never said it when you were a leader yourself!

ELDER Exactly! That is why I am not a leader today! Ha ha. Why are you silent?

GENTLEMAN I don't know Words, words, just words.

ELDER Speech is the one God in this world! Do you know Sanskrit? Let me tell you that speech is called Vagdevi in the Rgveda and is praised. Have you heard the lines *Ahamarashtri sangamani vasunam?* Vagdevi says that everything in the world happens because of her!

GENTLEMAN Ultimately it's just words. *(They fall silent, have nothing more to say)*

YOUTH *(To Friend)* Come on! Let's go farther! Otherwise the policeman will again come and make us sit down.

FRIEND I suppose he thinks that having come all this way, we might as well listen to the speeches.

YOUTH Damn all speeches! Words, words just words!

FRIEND *(Shows surprise)* Well! What else do you expect a speech to be?

YOUTH It's boring; that's why I said let's throw a few stones and watch the fun. Listening to speeches doesn't inspire anyone to work.

FRIEND *(Expectantly)* And if you throw stones?

YOUTH People will come alive in a minute.

Appreciating his own joke, laughs

The Policeman enters and goes srtraight to the Flower Girl

FLOWER GIRL *(To Beggar)* Do you know what I'm going to do?

BEGGAR About what?

FLOWER GIRL About the flowers given by the man with the rings?

BEGGAR What will you do with them?

FLOWER GIRL I'll make another garland, offer it to God and ask for something.

BEGGAR *(Laughing)* For what? For more meetings so that your business will flourish?

FLOWER GIRL I'll pray for the man who gave me these flowers to regain his old position.

POLICEMAN *(Confronting her)* Here! Do you have only flowers in your basket, or is there something else?

FLOWER GIRL *(Looking down)* Didn't I tell you, Sipahiappa, there are only flowers.

POLICEMAN *(Squatting)* I have my doubts. Let me have another look.

BEGGAR Empty your basket and show it to him.

POLICEMAN Hey! Who asked you to interfere? Empty the basket, he says! Do you think I want the flowers and garlands to lie in the dust?

FLOWER GIRL If you have any doubts, look for yourself. *(Pushes the basket towards him)*

POLICEMAN *(Searching)* Did I ask you to throw everything out? Do you think I want to spoil your flowers? You do your work, I do mine. *(Suddenly)* Hey! What's this?

FLOWER GIRL *(Taken aback)* What? Where?

POLICEMAN *(Takes something out of the basket and shows her)* This! *(Authoritatively)* I'm asking you--what is this?

FLOWER GIRL *(In a hurt voice)* Look Tirukappa! The ring man's trick!

POLICEMAN *(Authoritatively)* Don't avoid my question, answer me. I ask her what this is and she talks of the ring man's trick!

FLOWER GIRL *(Scared)* I'm not lying, Sipahippa. Ask this man. He was right here.

POLICEMAN *(With contempt)* I don't want a blind man's evidence.

FLOWER GIRL He may be blind, but he can hear. A man wearing rings came to me and told me 'Take these flowers. They've been given to you'. I told him my hands were not free and aksed him to put them in the basket. When he did, there was a 'khat' sound. I asked him whether there were stones in the flowers. And he told me that his rings made the sound.

POLICEMAN *(Getting up)* That's a good story.

FLOWER GIRL *(Helplessly)* I swear to God it's not a story, I beg of you, Sipahiappa, I Swear...

POLICEMAN *(Interrupting)* Shut up! Don't move from here! This is not a stone. I'll hand it over and be back.

Exits from right

YOUTH *(Seeing Policeman approaching)* Is he coming here again?

FRIEND *(Whispers)* Let him have your first stone.

Policeman comes to the Elder

POLICEMAN Why are you sitting here, Sir? Please sit in the front row.

GENTLEMAN Why do you disturb him? Leave him alone.

POLICEMAN Who are you? I know better than you who and what he is. If he sits here, he'll be behind the speakers. It's better that he sits there. *(Contemptuous laugh)* Disturbing him! Ha!

GENTLEMAN I mean we were discussing something...

POLICEMAN *(Interrupting)* You can sit at the back if you want!

ELDER It's all right Constable. If we sit in front, we'll have late comers stepping on our toes. Better to be here.

POLICEMAN *(Muttering to himself)* Sahebru seems to be determined to sit there. *(As he is going away, he suddenly remembers something and goes to the Flower Girl)* Who did you say gave you the flowers?

FLOWER GIRL A man with rings...

POLICEMAN Where did he get them?

FLOWER GIRL He didn't bring them, You know the person you were speaking to now, he said he had asked him to give them to me.

POLICEMAN *(Snapping his fingers)* I got it! I got it! *(Hurriedly exits from right)*

A moment's silence. Youth and Friend are still strolling around. Policeman returns, clears his throat noisily

YOUTH *(Loudly, so Policeman can hear)* Come on, let's go! God knows how much more time this will take.

POLICEMAN *(With his back to the spectatators, addressing people)* All of you--stay where you are. Don't move.

YOUTH *(Irritated)* What's this now? Come on, let's go!

POLICEMAN *(To Youth)* Didn't you hear what I said? *(Loudly)* Nobody is allowed to move from here. By now, the police have surrounded the place.

GENTLEMAN *(To Elder)* Looks like the leader is delayed.

POLICEMAN *(To Gentleman)* There's no need for your speeches. No, there's no delay. He'd already left, we rang up and asked him to come a little later.

YOUTH You think there's not enough of a crowd?

POLICEMAN *(Thundering)* Shut up! *(To crowd)* Luckily we discovered--*(Raises his hand as he hears murmurs of 'What', 'I say!)* Silence, I said! There was a plot to kill the leader at this meeting... *(Sudden shouts of 'Impossible,' 'Murder?' 'Who are the plotters?')* I'll tell you. We found it out, we even found a bomb. Look there. *(Points to Flower Girl)* It was in her basket of flowers. *('Wicked Woman', 'Beat her', 'Strip her' are heard. The policeman stands by her protectively)* Didn't I say you are not to move! Sit down! *(They sit down)*

GENTLEMAN *(Softly, to Elder)* What's this new problem?

ELDER If God has to be called great, we have to have a devil, don't we?

POLICEMAN *(To people)* Some clever people are behind this, there's no doubt about that. *(Points to Flower Girl)* They were going to make use of her. *(Shouts of 'Tell us who they are,' 'We'll skin them alive', 'When we find them, we'll hang them on the street lamps)*

POLICEMAN Be careful! If you move, the police will shoot. *(Sudden silence)* I'm warning you for the last time- stay where you are. *(Looks at everyone again and comes to Elder)* Saheb-re, please get up. We have to go to the police station. *(Even as Gentleman says, 'What is this?' The Policeman slaps him hard with his right hand, heaves up Elder with his left. To the Flower Girl.)*

You come to the police station to give evidence... *(Suddenly the lights go out)* Hey! Who's put out the lights? Switch them on! *(Trips over something)* Damn! What's there in this?

Shouts of, 'Someone is throwing stones' 'I'm hurt!' Sound of firing. People run helter-skelter. Gradually shouts fade away. Lights come on the stage. Flower Girl and Beggar are seated as they were. Some chairs are broken and lying on the ground. There are stones and broken sticks all over. For a minute both are silent

BEGGAR *(Softly)* Sister... *(She starts sobbing. He tries to pacify her)* Don't be scared sister. I heard it all, I'll give evidence...

FLOWER GIRL *(Controlling herself)* I'm not scared. But it's because of me that this great man has had to suffer. I'm a sinner.

BEGGAR Didn't you say that you would pray to God that all should go well with him? May be God has done him good.

FLOWER GIRL *(Hopelessly)* What can God do in this age Tirukappa?

BEGGAR Didn't I say I would give evidence?

FLOWER GIRL Our words are just words, Tirukappa. They have no value.

BEGGAR *(Laughs)* That makes it even. They don't value our words and we don't value theirs.

FLOWER GIRL (Doesn't understand why she is angry) Words, words! Let them all go to hell!

BEGGAR If there were no words, there would be no door to heaven, Sister. (Laughs softly)

The Third Door is Closed
End of the play

FORGIVE US OUR SINS

(1971)

Aparadhangala Kshamiso

Translated by ***Shashi Deshpande***

Some years back, chancing upon Shriranga's 'Sahitiya Atmajijnase', I read some passages which spoke of the early beginnings of his fascination with the theatre. I found these passages so wonderfully evocative of both the times as well as the man and his love for the theatre that I had an urge to translate it into English and share these passages with more readers. This gave me the ambitious idea of translating one of his plays. The play which immediately came to my mind was this one: 'Aparadhangala Kshamiso'. I had witnessed the first performance and I could still vividly remember the playful humour, the scintillating dialogue and the quick movements throughout the play. There was another and a very practical reason for choosing this play as well: it was easier to translate into English than most of his other plays. Contemporary, and dealing with a universal topic like the theatre, it also has the advantage of having characters who seem, in this context, to be classless and casteless–which makes it easier to 'English' their conversation. The pitfalls which wait for a translator when translating certain areas of our life could therefore be neatly avoided! An added advantage is that these five people are strangers--which means that the language is on the whole free of words of intimacy or abuse, both of which are so embedded in any culture that to pluck them out of there, is to sap them of their life and vitality. Yet there were other problems--the colloquialisms, for example. And terms of address–like 'Maharaya'; how

would I do this? Would it become 'gentleman? Or 'Sir'? Neither would really do. One of the seemingly simple words that gave me a lot of trouble and thought was 'kranti'. The literal meaning may be revolution, but applied to the theatre, even as a kind of ridicule as it is here, the word just wouldn't do. And yet as far as I was concerned, there seemed to be none other. (I may be wrong, of course) And there was the slight variation in speech of one of the characters, the Producer, who clearly belonged to a different class from the other four. How would I get that into English? The kind of roughness in speech that comes across in Kannada cannot find an exact equivalent in English. My method is not to force the language into anything that becomes incongruous–flatness is in my view better than a contrived and artificial speech pattern. Yet on the whole this play moves with a fair degree of comfort into English.

CHARACTERS

Producer (also Voice at the beginning);

Director;

Dramatist;

Young Man;

Young Woman;

Boy



The following voice speaks before the play begins and while the lights in the house are still on. It is important that each word should be clearly heard

VOICE I don't think I need to introduce myself. I'm sure you all know who I am. Go to any play nowadays and there I am, right at the beginning. As for what I'm here to do–well, my job is easy in one way and difficult in another. To stop you people chattering and make you look my way–that's not such a big problem. But I also need to tell you all about them--those people inside, you know--without making any mistake. And I have to make myself heard. That's tough! Of course, I could raise the curtains and just show them to you--but they're not ready as yet. And I know you people are not going to pay any attention until the curtain goes up. Anyway, let me get on with it. Six months back, we started this Kalavinashi Sangh to bring about a revolution in the theatre--to improve it, you know. I'm the manager of this Sangh. We have a Director who's about thirty--five, a Dramatist who's about fifty--two, a young man and a young woman who are about twenty–six–no, no, not together, I mean each one of them is about that age. My age? Never mind that. It's not important. In any case, I'll soon appear before you. My father earned money all his life, but he died before he could spend it. I'm doing that for him--by becoming the manager of this Sangh. The others are sitting in our Sangh room--and by the way, we haven't paid its rent for six months. I told them I had something important to do–you'll know what this is when I go back to them. Meanwhile, just have a look at them; you can see how gloomy they are, thinking of their future.

The stage gets brighter and the lights in the house go off. The theatre group room is now seen with all the items that would be part of such a room–chairs, a round table, a tatty sofa/bed/divan–all in disorder. Director (to the spectator's right) is reading a book (in English) on the theatre. He is dressed in a way that suits a progressive man. To his right is the bed, unoccupied. To the spectator's left is the Young

Woman, to her left the Young Man, both reading different pages of the same paper. In the armchair, to the Director's right, is the Dramatist reading a play. All their faces are hidden by whatever they are reading and not visible to the Spectator. After a moment, the Director goes to the door (left of spectator), looks out, comes back disappointed, and putting away his book, begins sketching on a piece of paper. Dramatist looks at his activities and goes back to his book. Young Man and Young Woman look at each other, then YM goes to door, returns disappointed and sits tapping on the round table. Others startled by the noise suddenly

ALL THE THREE *(in one voice)* Has he come?

YM shakes his head

YW Oh well, I guess that's the end of your plans to save the theatre.

YM *(Angrily)* What theatre? Six months now and we don't even have a theatre.

DRAM I think it was a mistake, announcing that we are going to revolutionise the theatre.

DIR And what should we have said? That we're going to stage plays?

YW *(suspiciously)* You mean we're not going to do any plays at all?

YM Where's the revolution if we stage plays like the others?

YW You mean the revolution is not doing any drama at all?

YM Ask our director that question. *(Dram. Laughs softly)*

DIR *(Contemptuously)* Oh, go ahead and do what everyone else is doing.

DRAM And why shouldn't they? That's exactly what they're asking you. Why shouldn't they? And, you know, I can write a play for you if you want.

DIR Theatre doesn't mean just writing a play. As a matter of fact, the play no longer matters. It's the director who's important.

DRAM Listen, if you don't understand my play, I'll explain it to you. That's what direction is, isn't it? *(Dir. laughs loudly and scornfully)* What's the problem?

DIR Your explanations, your instructions... *(can't control his laughter)*

YW *(Curiously)* What's so funny? Tell us.

DIR *(Controlling laughter, speaks to Dram)* All right, shall I show how you explain? And you won't lose you temper? *(Dram nods)* Sure? *(Dram nods again)* Okay, watch me then. *(Comes to centre stage and acts this out)* Now this is him directing three actors. *(Indicates that there are three characters–one to his right front, one to his left front and one a little to his left and behind him. As if he is reading something to the character right front)* Listen, these are your lines, okay? Memorise them before you come tomorrow. And don't think you can just read them the way I've done. *(Turning to the character to his left front)* Listen. *(As if he is reading out something)* These are your lines. You don't just speak these lines, you're replying to her, understand? Do you ever argue with your wife? You've got to speak loudly, see, don't whine like as if you're talking to your wife. Ha ha ha. They should be able to hear you, do you understand? *(Turns to his left back and as if patting the person)* As for you, you're such a veteran I don't need to tell you anything. Just be here tomorrow at five, okay? *(To character on right)* What's that? Your husband comes home at that time? Right then, I'll come to your house at four and go through your lines with you. *(Turning left)* Now, what's your problem? What do you mean all by yourself? I'll be here at five, won't, I, I'll read her lines with you. Okay? Is that all right? *(To character behind him)* And you needn't come at all for the next few days. Right then, tomorrow. And as long as I'm with you, you don't need to worry. Ha ha ha. What we want is a first class performance on the night, that's all. *(Change of voice, to Dram scornfully)* This is your method. *(Goes back to place)*

DRAM *(To sniggering YM)* And since when have you turned Director?

YM No, no it's not that, I was thinking of something else....

YW *(Curious)* What? *(YM indicates Dir with his eyes)* What about him?

DIR Scared to speak? Go on, say it, there's no need to be scared.

YW *(Laughing)* I know what he's going to say.

DRAM What?

YW *(Pointing to Dir)* You know--the brand new kind of direction. Ha ha ha.

DRAM *(Urging YM)* Come on, give us a chance to see some good acting.

DIR *(Noticing YM looking at him)* Go ahead, do you think I'm scared?

YM *(Gets up and goes to table centre stage. To* Young Woman*)* Come here. *(She stands behind the table.)*

YM *(Speaks in a particular style, and as if holding a director's script in his hand)* Now, look at you! Look where you're standing! Haven't I given you your position?

YW *(As if she knows all this)* Yes, you have, here, on this. *(Pointing to table)*

YM *(Speaking in the same way)* Then?

YW *(Feigning anger)* But I'm scared of falling!

YM That's exactly why you should get used to it during rehearsals.

YW But you promised me the table won't be so high...

YM For the actual performance, yes. But for rehearsals...

YW This is too tall. *(Saying so raises one leg and tries to get up. Suddenly thinks of the possibilities, puts feet firmly on the ground)* Gosh no! What if...

YM But, there are no spectators watching you now. *(When she makes her reluctance clear, he demonstrates by putting his two palms on the table and hoisting himself up)* Okay, then try it this way.

DRAM *(Laughing)* Is her position so important?

YM *(Still same style)* Yours *(to YW)* is the main role. And so you have to be at a higher level. *(Looking at someone right front)* Do you understand? You have to raise your head and talk like this--to suggest she's at a higher level. All right, then. *(Pretending to be listening to him, shakes his head)* No No No! What do you mean by speaking like that--holding your head up in that stiff--necked way! Drama is action, man, you have to always keep moving Like this. *(Raising a foot)* This is doing, action. *(Taking a step)* And this is movement. *(At this the Dram and YW suddenly laugh and then stop. Dir at first looks angry, then unable to help himself begins laughing. YM, laughing himself, moves back saying)* Hey, that's good. Everybody's laughing.

Producer comes in now. All four run to him and surround him asking 'What happened? Have you done it?

PROD *(Raising a hand for silence)* Just a minute, give me just a minute, I'll tell you everything *(Turns round)* The thing is--the main thing is--I've done it.

ALL FOUR *(Going to their earlier positions, they show surprise in their different ways)* Done it? Hoorah hoorah.

The Dram opens his pan box, YW, using the mirror from her bag, starts making up, the Dir acts out positions. But YM, excessively happy, turns somersaults on the stage, going from left to right. While the others laugh loudly, he gets up and dusts his hands.

PROD *(Sits on bed, controls his laughter)* It's finalized. We're going to stage a play.

YM *(Clapping)* We're going to stage a play.

PROD A charity show.

DIR *(Interrupting)* Call it a benefit performance.

PROD *(looks at Dir)* This man! Everything has to be in English for him! Okay, a benefit performance.

YW A modern director has to speak English.

DIR *(Irritated by their laugher)* Why not? They keep saying English will soon go out of our country. Why not use all the words we know before that?

DRAM Never mind all that. *(To Prod)* But tell me, you said a charity show? Who is the charity for?

PROD Well, right now I've donated three thousand rupees.

YM AND YW *(Together)* You? Why?

PROD *(Gesturing for silence)* I've given it to the officer in charge.

DRAM And?

PROD And the money that comes from the play will go to that chap--you know that VIP...

YW What VIP?

YM He means the guy who was a minister for years.

DIR But the man's dead--he died last month....?

DRAM *(Acts surprise)* He did? Is this Benefit Show a kind of funeral ceremony, then? His *shraddha*, huh?

PROD What the hell does it matter when he died! The point is that, though he was a Minister for so long, he didn't make a pile for himself. Well, that's what they say. And so this money is for his family.

YM *(Sarcastic)* I must say this is something new. They're taking bribes even after they're dead.

PROD My three thousand doesn't go to him. Haven't I make that clear?

DRAM What does that matter? Our first performance is now certain.

All of them sigh in relief. A moment's silence.

PROD We've got to start working right away--choose the play, do the casting, props, lights, costumes, notices...

As he is speaking, notices Director and draws everyone's attention to him

DIR *(Seeing that he has everyone's attention)* This is our chance to do what we really want to. *(The others look at one another)* It's a Benefit show--which means we get our expenses and the spectators are guaranteed. So why not an experimental play? *(Sees Prod looking at him)* I mean, something new, you know.

PROD *(Nervously)* Look here, you can call it what you want. But the spectators must understand it.

DIR *(With contempt)* There you go again, exhibiting your stupidity. What do you mean they should understand? Who are these 'they'? I'll tell you. Because it's a show in memory of a dead Minister, the Chief Guest will be a VIP who won't know our language. Naturally, all the government officers will come; but do you think they'll be thinking of the play, whether it's good or bad? No chance! They'll be brooding over their next files. Businessmen will come because the police and the revenue officials have sold them tickets; what they want is to be seen by the government officers and kowtow to them. Now tell me, who's this 'they' that's supposed to understand the play?

DRAM *(To Prod)* I'll tell you what--I'll write a new play. Then, you *(to Prod)* don't have to worry and he *(Director)* needn't be disgruntled. Is that all right?

YM *(Whispers to YW)* The guy must have stolen another play.

PROD *(Showing relief)* That's great. I saw a new play the other day--it had a funny name *(trying to remember, fails, turns to YM, YW)* Hey, didn't we see it together? Remember the day we rushed into the theatre to escape a lathi charge? Can you remember the name of that play?

YM, YW *(Laughing, together)* Football Prem.

DRAM *(Astonished)* What? Whose Prem?

PROD Love between a husband and a wife.

DIR But--but--they said Football Prem?

PROD That's right. That's the name of the play.

DRAM *(Even more surprised)* Now, does football get into a love story?

YW It doesn't. Love itself is the football.

YM No, no, the world of love is the game of football.

YW How do you get that?

YM Action, my dear, action. The action of the drama told me this.

DRAM Does the couple play football on the stage?

YM The man plays it. She is the football.

YW *(Laughing)* There she is--lying on the floor....

YM *(Standing up and acting it out)* He is kicking–what a player--he's passing the ball, yes all by himself–now he's gone past the half--back...

YW *(Still laughing)* She's lying on her side–he calls it half back...

YM Now he's crossed it, he's gone past full back...

YW Poor thing, she's lying on her face now...

YM He's going on, he's gone round his son, who's trying to save his mother, yes, he's got to the door and yes, yes, he's done it, he's done it, he's made a goal. *(Acts wiping his sweat)*

YW I tell you, the way the entire house laughed...

DIR *(Interrupting)* My God, real Theatre of Cruelty.

DRAM *(Irritated, to Dir)* Stop it, man! The way he recites names! It's like he's reeling off the names of capitals in his geography lessons. *(To YM, YW)* and how did the spectators react?

YM Well, a Very Important Person made a speech.

DRAM What about?

YM *(Comes forward and acts it out)* Discerning spectators, ladies and gentlemen, Respected Elders, all you people sitting here and all those outside–for actually my talk is not just for the spectators here, it's for the millions of our countrymen as

well. You read in the papers that independent India, which walks with such pride in the world of international politics, has to bow its head in the arena of international sports. And therefore, we need such plays to help our sports to progress. This play should be performed in all the Test match centres in the country–I mean in all our towns. I'm proud to make the announcement of this decision of the government. I'm sure you are pleased. With this I come to the end of my speech. *(Moves back and comes forward again, hurriedly)* We are grateful to this- this–*(asks someone beside him)* this football Prem- -I'm sorry, this football players group–for performing this play. (*Claps his hands and goes back to his seat)*

DRAM *(Taking a deep breath)* So, our theatre has finally reached the point of being kicked about, has it, eh?

DIR *(Stubbornly)* Which is why I say we need a revolution, we must experiment.

YM Yes, yes, we must experiment, specially when someone else is footing the bill.

DIR *(Irritated)* Are you implying that we can't make any money ourselves?

DRAM *(To Dir)* Come on, say it straight out, whatever it is you want to say.

DIR Have you any idea of how much the stage has progressed in other countries?

DRAM *(Bored)* I've heard it all before–their theatre is alive, it's progressing...

DIR *(Interrupting)* And therefore..

DRAM *(Stopping him)*... while our theatre is dead. How do you expect something dead to move?

PROD *(Astonished)* What–what are you saying? Just look around, man, haven't you noticed that plays are being staged all over the place? Why, some have even had a hundred performances. And you say the theatre is dead!

DRAM Come on, fellow,, can hundreds or even thousands of performances make it a living theatre if the spectators are dead? We're only decorating a dead body with imported finery, you know.

YM,YW *(Looking at each other)* Does this mean the actors are also dead?

DIR *(Like one who has come to a sudden decision)* This is absolute, crass ignorance. The theatre is alive. We'll bring it to life. This will be our revolution.

PROD Sure, sure, we'll do that too--when the time comes. But, right now....

DIR *(Ignoring him)* Have you heard of Sartre? *(Prod stunned at this unexpected question.)* Have you heard of Camus? *(Prod shakes his head).* Well, at least you've heard of Albee...?

PROD *(Humiliated by the contemptuous tone)* Why should I know them? You think I have nothing else to do?

DIR *(Authoritatively)* These are great names in modern theatre.

PROD *(Insistent)* But what are they?

The others laugh.

DIR *(Despairingly)* Not 'what' man, 'who'-'who are they?'. They are dramatists who have revolutionized the theatre.

PROD Where are they from?

DIR France, America...

PROD *(Interrupting)* Have they written plays in Kannada?

The others laugh

DIR *(Wholly disheartened)* You and your father's money... *(Pats his pockets and then touches his head)* But there's nothing up here.

DRAM *(To Producer)* Do you know how the Pandavas and Kauravas were born?

PROD *(Not understanding at all)* Why?

DRAM Their fathers were not the sons of their fathers.

PROD *(Surprised)* So? What has that to do with this?

DRAM Well, our stage today is like the Pandavas and Kauravas.

DIR *(To Dram)* He's no good himself. But that doesn't stop him from being jealous!

DRAM *(Ignoring him)* French and German drama into English, English into Kannada--that's how it goes. He *(Indicating)* calls it Kannada drama--it's just like calling the Pandavas and the Kauravas heroes.

PROD *(Putting an end to the subject)* Well, they can have their drama, we'll stick to ours

DRAM *(To Producer)* But it's because yours is dead that they're trying to revive it with the infusion of Western blood.

DIR *(Interrupting, stubbornly)* Absolute ignorance. Sheer envy. I tell you, our theatre is not dead, it's alive, let's prove that it's alive.

PROD Why don't we talk about these things later? What we need right now is a play. *(To Dram)* Have you written anything new?

DRAM *(Pointing to Dir)* First, let's see what kind of a play he has.

PROD *(To Dir)* Do you know anything that will suit us?

DIR Not to worry. I'll make it suit.

PROD Which one?

DRAM Whose?

DIR Have you heard of 'The Body Without a Head"?

Young people laugh among themselves

PROD What! Oh well, if it's suitable, we can always change the title, I guess. *(To Dram)* What do you say?

DRAM Let him tell us what it's about first. Does anyone else know this play?

YM *(Raising hand)* I do

YW Me too.

DIR *(Surprised)* How come you two know it?

YM It's written by our professor.

YW It was staged--privately--once.

DIR Have you seen it?

YW No. But I heard the professor read it out.

DRAM (To *Young Woman*) What's the story?

DIR laughs.

YW *(Shyly, pointing to YM)* Ask him.

DRAM *(To Director)* Why did you laugh?

DIR Because there is no story.

PROD What! But, surely, there are characters in the play? *(YM nods to this and the next questions)* And there are links between them? Well then? There's got to be a story.

YM It's not like that, I mean there are characters and they do speak, but--somehow--I don't know *(Hesitates)*

DRAM *(To YM)* Is there a beginning? *(YM nods)* And an end? How does it end?

YM There are only two characters--a man and a woman.

YW *(Interrupting)* Finally, both of them commit suicide.

Dram. Prod sigh. Silence

DIR But what power that drama has!

PROD What does power of drama mean?

YM Power means strength.

DRAM *(Irritated)* I know that. But what's the use of it?

DIR *(Scornfully)* What's the use? It's the original power in the Universe.

DRAM What is?

DIR Sex.

PROD *(Utters a dismayed 'Oh!')*

DRAM Okay, sex and creation are linked. But why the suicide?

YW Exactly! Which is why I refused to see it.

DIR *(Angrily)* If your old-timer--your Kalidasa--speaks of lips like this, breasts like that, thighs smooth as silk, that's okay, is it?

YM Actually, if you ask me, I don't think there's anything in that play that can't be shown on the stage.

YW Oh, come on. Didn't the professor say during the reading that certain action has to be performed on the stage?

DRAM What's that?

YW *(Shyly)* I don't know.

PROD *(To YM)* What was it.?

YM Oh, nothing really. Actually, if you think of it, it's something that's done every day everywhere...

DRAM *(Irritably)* But what is it?

YM A street scene with a man urinating.

Except Dir. the others look disgusted

DIR What's wrong, man? Go for an evening walk and you'll see that sight.

DRAM You can avoid looking at it on the street. But bring it on the stage and the audience has no choice. Mess up the whole theatre, I say--I don't have a problem, but not when there are spectators.

DIR *(Contemptuously)* Oh no, let's just ring a bell to warn people to close their eyes.

PROD Why the hell are we arguing about all this now? May be they enjoy watching that kind of stuff abroad; we'll worry

about that when it comes to us. Right now let's decide on a play.

DIR *(Scornfully)* Why not choose *Satya Harischandra.*

YW No sob stuff, please.

DRAM *(To Dir.)* You know, we aren't such bumpkins as you think. We'd like a modern play too.

PROD *(Emphatically)* The spectators must understand what's going on.

YW The female role shouldn't be a weepy one.

YM The young man must not commit suicide.

PROD It's got to be ready within a short time. That's important.

YM *(Abruptly)* In that case, I know just the thing. Small speeches. Nothing complicated. No problem of not understanding. And if you want something modern, it's very modern...

PROD *(Interrupting)* When you say there's no problem of not understanding, does it mean you can't understand or ...

DRAM ....Or that there's nothing to understand?

YM I think we'll act it out and show you. Just a sample. *(Whispers in YW's ears. She nods enthusiastically. Both come centre stage)*

Here's a couple--they've lived together for twenty years. It's Sunday--usual Sunday. The man is at home, he's reading the paper. The woman is stitching something.

The two get into their roles, they stand away from each other. She occasionally looks at him, he's engrossed in reading. Whenever he gives her a sideways look, he quickly looks away before she can catch him. There's silence for a minute.

YW *(Not looking at him)* It's Sunday today. *(No reply. Looking at him).* Today is Sunday.

YM *(Reading)* Yes, yesterday was Saturday.

Silence again.

YW *(Making a stabbing movement of the needle)* I said it's Sunday today.

YM *(Turning a page)* So tomorrow will be Monday.

YW *(Irritated at missing a stitch)* Damn these Sundays!

YM *(Looking for a page)* Anyway, Monday will be here.

YW *(Waving a fly away)* God! How I hate Sundays!

YM *(Finds his page)* Yes, it was Saturday yesterday. Here's the racing page.

YW Damn Sunday. Can't even go to the temple–it's so crowded. *(Acts wiping her eyes)*

YM *(Finding something on the page)* Satyameva Jayate is running in the 3.30 race. An old horse, that one. Ha ha ha.

YW *(Wiping her eyes and suddenly cheering up)* Monday tomorrow--so he won't be at home. I might as well do this then.

YM *(As if he's found something)* It's over, the last race must be over. Back to the grind tomorrow. Monday.

YW *(As if something has suddenly struck her)* I know, I'll ask Lalita to come tomorrow. Her husband will also be at work.

YM *(Sounding depressed)* Monday–that means a pile of mail waiting...

YW *(Hurriedly)* Let me put this right. *(Goes back to her original position)*

YM *(Speaking to the others)* Now the clock will strike ten. While it goes on striking *(counts out the numbers)*--there, damn it, Monday. Oh, how difficult, how hard it is even to walk back to bed. *(Acts this out and goes back to his earlier position)*

Dram. Prod. wait a moment expecting more until they see the two back in their earlier positions.

DRAM *(To YM)* Is it over? *(YM nods)* Is the scene over or is the drama finished?

YW We showed you the last bit.

PROD So what happens finally?

YM Sunday ends and Monday dawns.

PROD That's the weekly calendar, man. What happens in the drama?

DIR *(With patronizing laugh)* You have time until next Sunday to think of that. Ha ha ha. *(Prod and Dram look at each other meaningfully)* I knew you wouldn't like this kind of thing. Anyway, do as I say--stage your play every Sunday, I guarantee you'll have enough spectators.

PROD *(Pleading voice)* Look here, I've already spent three thousand rupees--that's no joke. If you people really want the Kalavinashi Sangh to get going, we have to decide on something. For Heaven's sake, show some responsibility.

DIR *(Irritated, interrupting)* Well, I spoke like a responsible man. If you people don't have the sense to understand, that's not my problem.

DRAM *(To Dir.)* Listen, man, our understanding is not the point. What the poor man is desperately trying to say is that the spectators should understand.

YM You know, you should have laid down a condition when you gave your three thousand as bribe.

YW What condition?

YM That we don't promise to give a play that can be understood.

DRAM *(To Prod)* Now, look here, this is what we'll do. *(To Dir)* And you better agree.

DIR To What?

DRAM If he *(pointing to Prod)* or I, or *(pointing to YM, YW)* these two--if any one of us agrees with you, we do it your way. If not, you've got to let me have my way.

DIR *(After a moment's thought)* Right, done!

DRAM looks at YM, YW. They nod.

DRAM Right then. Begin your story.

YW *(Hurriedly)* Wait--one--one--just one minute.

DRAM Now what?

DIR Are you going to object even before I speak?

YM Madam, the last word shall be yours.

PROD Look at me--I'm suffering. And for you people it's just a joke.

YW *(Gets up)* Listen, I think you'll all agree with this. *(Whispers in YM's ears. He nods enthusiastically and before he gets up, she goes centre stage and looks at the other three)* You want something modern? Okay, this is modern. You want something easy to understand? This is it. And yes, good techniques, dialogues... We'll show you a bit of it. Watch us. *(YM join her)*

DRAM What do you call this? Theatre of the Absurd? Cruelty? Happening?

YM *(Laughing)* Just sit back and enjoy it. That's important. The name matters only to him *(points to Dir)* Ha ha--'like the names of capital cities in a geography lesson' Ha ha ha.

YM, YW get ready to enact the scene.

PROD *(Muttering as if to himself)* Three thousand rupees! And here I am, caught in this trap... *(Wipes his sweat)*

DIR It's your father's money, man, he's the one who sweated for it, why the hell are you wiping your sweat?

YM stands centre stage looking to his left, YW to his right, a little behind him, looking to her right. In the scene that follows they never confront each other.

YM Why have I come?

YW Who am I, they ask?

YM The way ahead, they say. Fools! *(Moves back a step)*

YW From where have I come? Ha!

YM I'd go back, yes, but I have no eyes.

YW From where have you come? Please sit down. *(Moves back a step as if welcoming someone)*

YM What is life? It's not dying.

YW Have you come from my womb?

YM This is my wife.

YW I'm your mother.

YM This is my sister.

YW I'm your grandmother.

YM This is my daughter.

YW I'm your wife.

YM *(Contemptuously)* I? She? Only one? Two from one? Ha ha ha. *(Moves a step back)*

YW *(As if pleading)* Dearest, I want nothing but your love. My husband has given me children. *(Moves back after saying this)*

YM The world! Ha! Where is it? *(Saying this moves back until he comes back to back with YW)*. This is the world.

YW *(Showing pleasure)* Aah! Bodies touching...

YM Prithvi, Aaap, Tejas, Vayu, Akash...

YW Face to face--love, back to back--malice, blows...

YM My shit is Prithvi, my urine is Aap, the touch of bodies is Tejas, my fart is Vayuu, what I belch out is Aakash. *(Moves forward. Prod has covered his ears. Dir. watches with a smile, Dram with pity, shaking his head)*

YW I will clean, I will scrub, I will suckle, I... I... I... *(moves forward)*

YM *(Suddenly facing audience and in an angry voice)* What comes from the earth must rot on earth--this is the world.

YW My womb to grow in, the outside world to die in...

YM *(As above)* What comes from the body must die within it. *(Sudden understanding)* Life planning.

YW The world is a stage for dying.

YM *(As if the thought fills him with hope)* One must die. *(Turns his back to the audience)*

YW *(Facing audience)* Death is the goal of life.

YM *(Like one making a proclamation)* Death is *moksha.*

Acts hanging himself and dying

YW *(Sighing)* The death of others is the goal of my life.

Looks at other three, then at YM who is back in his earlier position. The two laugh. She goes back to her earlier position. A moment's silence

DRAM *(To YM)* Did some college professor write this too?

YW He was a professor. He resigned.

PROD Shall we start an agitation to make them accept it?

YW Oh, this happened long back.

DRAM *(To Prod)* What's your problem, man? Why are you so angry?

PROD *(To YM)* Those words--you know, those disgusting things you said--are you going to do all those things on the stage?

All, except Dram laugh

DRAM *(To Dir)* Do you call this modern? *(Begins to rise)*

PROD *(Nervously to Dram)* Don't you ditch me now, man!

Dram, staring at Dir, stops Prod with a gesture

DIR Actually this is nearly twenty or thirty years old. *(As Dram raises his eyebrows in surprise)* But, for us, in this country perhaps, it's modern.

PROD You mean to say that they've gone even further in the West? *(To Dram)* I've heard that in America they--yes, they come nude on the stage. That's why I'm asking, you know.

DRAM *(Turning towards Prod)* This stuff you saw... you call it modern? Absolutely not! Nothing modern about coming nude on the stage, either. We've had these things for ages.

PROD *(Stunned)* What? Coming nude on the stage... No, no, how can you say that? Our culture–our theatre traditions...

DRAM Since you're all ignorant fools, I'll tell you. Listen. Haven't you heard the hero describing the heroine in Sanskrit plays? 'Your eyebrows are like Cupid's bow, your nose is like a lotus petal, your lips are like ripe fruit, your teeth like pomegranate seeds'--*(explaining)*--these two are things to be eaten tasted, you know--'your breasts are like a pot of gold, your thighs...' *(notices Prod's distress and laughs)* Okay, okay, if you've had enough, I won't go on. Well, then, how much more nudity do you want?

YM *(Laughing)* But the heroine wore clothes, didn't she?

DRAM *(To YM)* Of course she did! Isn't it better to leave it to the spectators' imagination than to show an ugly body?

DIR That's how you see it. But why do you say that what they *(points to YM, YW)* acted out just now is not modern?

DRAM *(Condescending laugh)* Oh that! That's no more than what we see in everyday life.

DIR *(Angrily)* Don't talk such utter rot!

DRAM *(Acting surprise)* What do you mean rot? Anyway, let me show it to you. *(Comes centre stage)* I'm sure you've seen this in your own homes. *(He gets ready to act. YM, YW applaud)* Here is the husband, standing at the door and looking out. *(Stands facing audience. YM laughs)*. Here, inside the room, is the wife *(Moves slightly back to show her position)*. She's looking down--like this. *(Turns to Dir and shows him)* Okay? Now, listen to the dialogue.

HUSBAND I'm off to the club.

WIFE The kid has been shitting since morning.

HUSBAND Lock the door.

WIFE Piss all over the house... Vomit... Filthy rags everywhere. And not even a bit of soap to wash them.

HUSBAND I'll be late at night.

WIFE *(Looking inside)* I'll throw you all into the well and jump in myself. Why has God given me so many children! Men! This is the only thing they do at home.

HUSBAND Why is the bastard crying? Kick him on his arse. *(Faces spectators)* I'm off now. *(Acts opening the door)*

WIFE I'll give them all poison and take some myself. I hope bloody death will come to me at least then.

Enacts husband adjusting his clothes and going out with a smile. YM and YW who have been suppressing their laughter since the line 'the only thing they do at home' now burst out.

DRAM *(Looking at them)* This is an eternally modern story with us. Why are you two laughing?

DIR And why can't we have it this way in a play?

DRAM *(Turning to him)* Why should we? This is how most people live. Write a play like this, and they're going to say--what kind of a dramatist is this! He knows no more than we do.

PROD *(To Dram, pointing at YM)* But--but when he said all that--about Prithvi and Aap--all those indecent disgusting things, you know--then--then--

DRAM Don't people say exactly this in the mornings on waking up? *Vishnupatni namastubhyam, padasparsham kshamsva me, Vishthamutra kaphotsargam aparadham kshamasva me.* Suppose we translate this and say--pardon me for shitting, pardon me for pissing etc., etc., does it suddenly become modern? Do you have to come on stage and strip before a crowd to be modern? *(Goes back to his position)*

PROD *(With a tired sigh)* Gentlemen, tell me, have I made any demands? Have I? Not until now, anyway.

DRAM *(Smiling)* Not until now--that means...? *(Sits down)*

PROD *(In a determined tone)* But now I too will have my say. If you stop all this foolishness and choose a play, well, that's fine. If not, I wash my hands off you. I've already spent three thousand rupees; another couple of thousand will give me a license to start some business. To hell with you and your Kalavinashi Sangh!

DIR *(Angrily)* Who began all this tomfoolery? Didn't I say that I'd do my job responsibly? *(Pointing at YW and imitating her)* She's the one who began all this with her 'one-one-just one minute'.

PROD *(Despairing)* God knows what they're all saying. My head is reeling.

YM To tell you the truth, I'm feeling a bit giddy as well. *(Winks at YW)*

YW Me too.

DRAM *(Looks at the two of them meaningfully and laughs)* Aha! I understand.

DIR *(Irritated)* If you don't want me to speak, say no and I'll go away.

DRAM *(To Dir)* Oh no, that's not it. What they mean is that they want some tea.

PROD *(Nervously)* Tea? What tea now? We haven't yet decided on the play--under what account will I put this tea?

YW Call it the inauguration of rehearsals.

YM A bonus bribe for selecting the play.

DRAM *(To Prod)* Go on, man, order it. We don't know how long this discussion will continue.

DIR And I suppose after you drink your tea you'll go home.

DRAM *(Interrupting)* Don't worry, we won't go without hearing your speech.

PROD *(Seeing it's inevitable)* But there's one condition...

DRAM What's that?

PROD We're not leaving this place until we've decided on a play.

DIR *(Laughing)* He's hoping that this bribe at least will give him some returns. Ha ha ha.

YW I agree, I agree.

YM Me too. *(Facing audience)* We will now have a ten minutes interval.

Acts as if he is bringing down a curtain. Darkness

INTERVAL

When the lights come on, it's clear that some minutes have elapsed. Cups and saucers are strewn on the round table. Dir lights a cigarette, seems engrossed in thought as he gazes at the smoke. Dram opens his pan box, YM, YW are tidying themselves. Prod stares in turn at the Dir and at the others. Finally, unable to bear the silence, bursts out.

PROD *(To Dir)* Now then, are you ready to speak?

No reply.

YM, YW *(Turning to Prod)* We're ready to listen.

DRAM *(Absorbed in what he's doing)* Yeah, I'm listening too. Go on.

PROD *(Urging Dir)* Hm, come on man, get on with it. *(Dir silently points to cups and saucers)*

They don't bite you, do they? The boy will come and take them away. *(Dir silent, absorbed in watching his puffs of smoke)* I'm a damn fool to get into this... *(as he is speaking, the boy enters. Prod turns angrily to him)* Why are you so late?

BOY How was I to know you'd finished? *(Picks up things)*

YM Those flies you brought with the tea--didn't they fly back and tell you the cups were dry?

Boy angrily ignores this, finishes his work, goes to Prod with bill

PROD Always in a hurry for your money! We're going to order tea many more times. *(All, except Dir, look at him in surprise)* I'll pay the whole bill at once. *(Boy goes out slowly, making it clear he doesn't believe Prod)*

YM *(To YW)* Looks like there's more tea coming.

DRAM *(To Prod)* How long are you going to keep us here?

PROD *(Surprised)* What do you mean how long?

DRAM You told him we'll need his tea again...

PROD But did I say 'today'?

DRAM Not today? But then ....?

PROD We're going to need tea during all our rehearsals, aren't we? I'll pay the bill when it's all over.

YM Aha! That means on C-R-E-D-I-T.

PROD *(Irritated)* I don't have any money right now. Let me get the advance, then I can pay him may be.

DRAM *(Laughs, mouth full of paan)* I say, you've given a bribe of three thousand. Don't tell me you don't have money to pay for tea!

YW *(Angrily)* It's always like this! I spend my own money to get here every day. And they don't pay even after the drama is over.

PROD If there's no sale of tickets, there's no money. That's all. Anyway, why bring up the past? And look at this new Sangh of ours--no play, no rehearsals. Nothing.

DIR *(Abruptly)* Have you all done with your financial discussions?

YM Since we're not paying, it's only a discussion, there are no finances.

PROD Oh, stop it. *(To Dir)* Now, come on, tell us your ideas.

DIR First let me make one thing clear. If I am to direct your play, remember this--just as I kept mum until the boy took the cups away, I'm going to be silent on the day until people come in and sit down. That means, I won't begin the drama at all.

All except Prod look at him in surprise

PROD *(Not understanding)* Until they come in and sit down? What do you mean, man? Isn't that just what they'll be there for?

DIR *(Explaining)* What I mean is, once the play begins no one will be allowed inside.

YM *(To YW, softly)* What if people want to go out?

PROD *(Glaring at YM)* Okay, okay, we'll do it your way. But right now, let's just think of a play.

DIR *(Interrupting)* No, no no. It's no use saying we'll do it, I need an assurance.

PROD *(Fed up, to Dram)* Do you want a guarantee? Say it right now. *(Smiling, Dram shakes his head. To YM, YW)* And you two? *(They shake their heads. To Dir)* So it's just you. Okay, no problem, I'll give you an assurance. Now, go on

DIR *(Persisting)* Whoever it may be, however big and important the person is...

PROD *(Interrupting, angrily)* No no no. However big they are, even if they're so huge that they can't get in through the door, they won't be allowed in. Is that enough for you? I'll lock the door and throw the key away. Okay? *(Pleading)* But first, promise me you'll do the play. We still have to choose one ...

DIR My idea is this. He *(indicating Prod)* thinks modern plays won't appeal to spectators. But we're determined to do something new, something different. *(YM, YW raise their hands in a jesting manner to show they too agree.)*

PROD Listen, all that I've been saying is I don't want the responsibility of choosing a play. I don't care whether it's

modern or future, people should be able to understand it. And it should entertain. This is all I want.

DIR *(Persistent tone)* But why? That's what I want to know, that's what we're asking you.

PROD *(Surprised)* Why? Because that's what people expect.

YM That's their problem. What can we do about it?

YW Hey, don't forget us. We're actors. It's got to make sense to us, it has to entertain us first.

PROD *(To Dram)* and what do you want?

DRAM Nothing. Spectators or no spectators, whether the play works or doesn't, I want my royalty first. That's all!

PROD *(Angrily, to all)* If there are no spectators, there's no money.

DRAM *(Interrupting)* Which is why I said I want my royalty first.

PROD *(Ignoring him, to YM, YW)* Tell me this--who's going to watch you act? *(To Dir)* What's the use of your direction? That's why I keep saying--the most important thing is entertaining the spectators. Don't think I'm asking money for myself, it's for you people. But we need spectators. Understand?

DIR *(In a decisive tone)* In that case, there's nothing for me here. Damn you and damn your Sangh.

DRAM *(Patronizingly)* Listen, tell me what kind of a play you want. I'll write it for you. We don't have to worry about spectators and whether they understand anything--not right now, anyway. Why waste time in futile arguments?

PROD That's right, man. That's the way to talk! Why argue about theories of drama when we should be choosing a play?

DRAM That's a sign of modern theatre. *(Quickly changing tone, to Dir)* Sorry, no more jokes. All right, tell us your ideas.

DIR My idea is this. *(Pointing to Prod)* I have no problem doing the kind of play he wants. But I insist that we stage it with

modern techniques.

PROD *(Showing that he doesn't want to argue)* Do what you want. Is this all?

DRAM *(To Prod)* Hey, hey, hold on, hold on. Don't leave it at that. First, let's find out what this new technique is. I know how it is--after we've chosen the play and started rehearsing, you'll go about moaning 'I didn't know *this* was the new technique'.

PROD *(Trying to end the subject)* Okay, go ahead and tell me. What do you mean by new technique?

Dir seems to be absorbed in thought for a moment, then rises. They stare at him curiously.

DIR *(Like one having come to a decision)* Let's do it this way.

YM, YW How?

PROD What?

DIR *(Staring at all of them)* We start the play from the end.

YM, YW *(Half rising)* Hear, hear.

DRAM *(Looking at Dir and nodding)* Wonderful!

PROD *(Looking at each of the three in turn)* Have you all understood what he said? *(They nod)* I wonder whether you heard what I heard.

DRAM *(Laughing)* Why, man?

PROD *(Irritated)* Why? Are you all crazy?

YM Would we have become actors if we were normal people?

PROD *(Angrily)* Oh, go to hell, you and your acting and your normality. A simple thing like staging a play and one wants to dance naked, another wants vulgar abuse, someone else wants to go on stage and do things that animals do on the streets. And now this man, this modern director, wants to begin with the end. Yes, yes, go ahead and do it. And the audience will begin your end all right, they'll ask for their

money back. *(Takes money from his pocket and gives it to Dram)* Here, give the boy his money. You can keep the change. I want to have nothing to do with you blokes.

Starts out angrily. Dram stops him, seats him on the bed and speaks in an authoritative tone.

DRAM Sit down, man, sit down. Stupid chap. Wants to go away because someone says something. Don't you know there's a huge gap between what people say and what they do? If people were to really do what they say, our Earth would have become Heaven long ago. And the Lord wouldn't have had to take a season ticket to visit us in his different avatars. Sit down, I say. *(Makes him sit)*

DIR *(Angry tone)* The whole lot of them spouting words. And I--it seems I'm the man who only talks, who doesn't do what he says...

DRAM *(Interrupts, scornful tone)* You're like all the others, a leaf on the same tree. I'm speaking of what the crores of people in our country are like. I was speaking of all the politicians who say they're thinking of our good and then look after themselves. We theatre people don't have a monopoly in dishonesty, you know. Now, come on, start your end.

YM, YW laugh and suddenly stop.

PROD *(A final attempt at protesting)* You know, I think you guys haven't really realized what he said. *(As if explaining, in a loud voice)* He said he would begin with the end. *(Dir laughs pityingly)* That means the beginning is the end, no, no, it means the end is the beginning, no, it means... *(all laugh. Angrily)* Why are you laughing? Ask the man who said it whether he understood what he was saying!

DRAM That's exactly what I've been trying to tell you. Don't be in such a great hurry. Let him complete what he was saying.

PROD *(Disgusted tone)* Huh! Okay, tell us then. Let's hear the end of your beginning.

DIR *(Comes forward, to Prod)* Did you hear what I said? *(Angry nod from Prod)* Did you understand what you heard?

PROD *(Angrily nodding)* Forget about me, man, have you understood it?

DIR *(Explaining)* I said we start from the end, I didn't say we finish it.

PROD *(Still angry)* End--finish--they mean the same thing in Kannada--they always have. But, of course, if in your English, end has a different meaning, I don't know its meaning.

DIR The end is the end for everyone.

PROD Everyone's end? Does that mean...?

DRAM *(Interrupting)* For everyone, man, for everyone--not everyone's end.

DIR *(Ignoring this)* I'm speaking of the end of the drama. Now, you tell me, what does end of the drama mean?

PROD What do you mean what does the end mean? It means the drama is over.

DIR *(Angrily)* Not that way, man. What tells you the drama is over?

YW *(Suddenly)* I know. Singing Jana Gana Mana. *(Dir shakes his head)*

YM The spectators get up and go out. *(Dir shakes his head)*

PROD *(Looking at all this in surprise)* I don't know how your modern dramas end. But in our kind of drama, we let go the curtain.

DIR *(Clapping)* Ha! For the first time you've spoken some sense.

PROD *(Not understanding)* What has this to do with what you were saying?

DRAM *(Laughing, to Prod)* Don't you understand? The old custom is to let down the curtain at the end, the new way is to start the play by bringing it down.

PROD *(Still in the dark)* Bringing the curtain down *(looks at Dir. Dir with bored face shakes his head)* You mean act with closed...

(looks at Dram who nods) You mean the spectators will need X ray eyes to see the play?

YW *(Hesitantly)* Maybe, they can sit on the other side of the curtain...?

YM But why do the spectators need to see the play at all?

PROD *(When Dram is laughing, to YM)* What? What's that...? *(In despair)* What are you saying?

YM *(Apologetically)* After all, it's a Benefit show...

DIR *(Unable to control his anger any longer)* Have you all done? *(Mocking tone)* Now, will you do me a favour and let me complete what I want to say? *(All silent)* Do I have your permission to begin? *(Dram gestures as if saying 'go ahead, do what you want')* Right then, let met tell you–*(Comes centre stage)* The dramatist may write the way he understands, but the director conveys his own understanding to the audience.

PROD Thank God, there's some understanding... *(stops at Dram's gesture)*

DIR *(Glaring at Prod, angrily)* Hell, this is no use, not for you people. I think I'll show you a sample and then explain. *(To YM)* Come here, do you know *Julius Caesar*?

YM *(Coming forward)* Do I know *Julius Caesar*? Do I? I know it by heart. *(Suddenly declaiming)* Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears...

DIR *(Interrupting scornfully)* This is not an examination hall. First listen to me. Brutus dies in the end--do you know that bit?

YM By heart. 'He runs on his sword and dies.' *(Acts it out. YM laughs)*

DRAM *(Laughing)* These young people–always in a hurry to die. Ha ha.

DIR *(To YM)* You've been an actor for so many years. Don't you know that you must take instructions from the director?

YM *(Apologetically)* Sorry, sorry. Go on.

DIR *(Describing)* Let me tell you the context of the scene. Brutus' servant Clitus cries out 'fly, fly fly' from inside. Then he comes out and says 'Fly, my Lord'. Do you know what next? *(Holds up his hand to stop YM spouting his lines)* And then... and then... Right, imagine that Clitus has spoken his lines and gone out. Imagine I'm Brutus' other servant Strato. *(Moves back)* Now start. *(Like one giving the cue)* One--two--three. Clitus is here. He's just said 'fly, my lord, fly'.

Saying this he gestures to YM to begin. Both of them act out the next three speeches.

YM *(As Brutus, gesturing to Clitus to go)*

Hence! I Will follow,

I prithee, Strato, stay thou by thy lord;

Thou art a fellow of good respect

Thy life hath had some smatch of honour in it;

Hold, then, my sword, and turn away thy face,

While I do run upon it. Wilt thou, Strato?

DIR *(As Strato)* Give me your hand first, fare you well, my Lord.

YM *(As Brutus)* Farewell, good Strato.

Acts shaking hands. Dir moves back and stands arms stretched out as if holding a sword before him.

Caesar, now be still;

I killed not thee with half so good a will.

Saying so, runs forward, acts being pierced by the sword and falls down as if dead.

DIR *(Triumphantly)* Now, do you understand?

PROD *(Not understanding)* But this is an English drama!

Dir Throws up his hands in despair.

YM *(Raising his head)* Can I get up?

DIR *(Stopping him with one hand and pointing him out to Prod with the other)* There you see!

This is what happens in your old dramas.

PROD You mean he shouldn't die even when he's been stabbed in the heart?

DIR *(Explaining, persistent)* Brutus is dead. But is he dead? No, he isn't. Is the drama over? No, it's not. Is the scene complete? No. So what should he do? Which is why he sat up and asked me--can I get up?

YM *(Insulted)* But... in the drama... *(Stops and falls down again at Dir's gesture)*

DIR *(To Prod)* Now, tell me, isn't it to avoid this kind of thing that you bring down the curtain?

PROD Imagine that I've said 'yes'.

DIR *(Sarcastic)* Of course, you've got no choice but to say 'yes'. Okay, now let me ask you this: if someone dies in life, do they bring down a curtain or do they gather round the dead person and cry? *(Gestures to YM to get up. YM rises, dusts himself and goes back to his place. YM, YW laugh. Dir. irritated)* As soon as someone dies, they prepare the body, but here *(looking at YM)* he has to lie down until the scene is over. Which is why I say--why don't we just let go the curtain instead of having this kind of an artificial technique?

PROD *(Persisting)* But--letting down the curtain at the beginning...

DIR *(Irritated, interrupting)* 'let down, let down, let down'. All this time I've been saying, no, I've been screaming 'let go' not 'let down'. What I mean is let's do without the curtain. If his *(pointing to Dram)* cleverness and your stupidity think it's bringing down the curtain, what can I do?

PROD *(Jumping into argument)* Now it's you who's being stupid. You asked me what makes you think a drama is over and I said...

DIR *(Interrupting)* Well, what did you say? Huh? What did you say? *(Mimicking)* I don't know how your dramas end, but in our dramas we let go the curtain.

Dram laughs in sudden understanding

PROD *(Irritated)* Yes, of course. And you agreed...

DIR *(Interrupting)* You spoke of letting go the curtain, not of letting down...

PROD *(Furious)* Whatever I may have said, don't you know both mean the same?

DRAM The Dir's meaning is always a very special one.

PROD *(Muttering)* When you say you let go the curtain after a drama is over, everybody knows what you mean is bringing it down.

DIR I know that. Which is why I'm saying–let's get rid of this contrived technique, let's not have curtains at all.

PROD *(Staring at him)* Is this all you want to say?

DIR *(With a condescending laugh)* To understand even this little bit, you...

PROD *(Stopping him with raised hand)* Now, if you've done, I have something to say.

Dir Laughs contemptuously.

YM You?

YW What?

Dram looks at Producer curiously.

PROD *(To Dir)* I'm ready to do without the curtain *(the three look at one another in surprise)* but there will be no tickets, either. Do you agree to that?

DIR If we're going to do your kind of drama, it's better not to have any tickets at all.

PROD *(Showing Dir his old position, authoritatively)* Now, sit down here. *(When he doesn't move, pulls him, speaking loudly)* I said sit

down. *(Dir joins the others in laughter.)* Don't laugh. First listen to me carefully. *(Stares at all of them in an intimidating manner)*

DRAM *(Controlling laughter)* What's the matter with you? Suddenly inspired?

PROD *(Authoritatively)* Why not? Do you think inspiration is the dramatists' family property?

YM This is not inspiration. Our Manager Saheb is excited. Ha ha.

PROD *(Same tone)* Much you know of excitement, you_all you know is to start trembling when you go on the stage.

YW I'll tell you what it is. He's suddenly getting ideas. It's never happened before, you see.

PROD *(Giving her a furious look)* This is what happens when women are educated!

YW *(Furious)* What happens?

PROD They're always trying to show off, always trying to prove that they're cleverer than men.

DIR *(Laughing)* Have you finished praising all of us?

PROD Yes, the prize distribution is over. Now the Chief Guest-that is I_will talk. Listen to me carefully. *(To Dir)* Reading English dramas doesn't make you an authority on our theatre. *(To YM)* Don't think that you're an actor just because you can recite Shakeshpeare by heart. *(To Dram, noticing his smile)* And as for you_I know you. You buy secondhand copies of old English dramas, steal them and quietly pass them off as something new.

Looks all three of them over.

YM *(Pointing to YM)* What about her? Why have you left her out?

PROD *(Contemptuously)* She! She's only a female! What she really wants is a chance to dress up and show herself off to a crowd–and she calls that love of the theatre!

YW *(Suddenly getting up)* If this is what you think of me, I'm off. *(Pointing to YM)* You can dress him up in a sari and powder his face.

PROD *(Stopping her from going and yelling at her)* Sit down. *(Abruptly changing tone to that of one comforting a child)* Sit, child, sit. *(Acts as if he's taking a kerchief from his pocket and wipes her eyes. The atmosphere becomes lighter. His tone changes)* I said, sit down. I know you won't go away and you know I won't let you go. Sit, woman. *(She acts like one who sits reluctantly. The others laugh)* Why are you laughing? She isn't like you guys, she's a sensible girl; she knows it makes sense to listen to the words of an experienced man. *(Coming to the point)* Now, the Chief Guest's speech. Drama enthusiasts–in other words, fools–if the theatre is to flourish, we need to stage plays. The most important thing to do if you want to stage a play is to choose one. But without money, you can't have a play. Therefore you need people who give you money. Right now, I'm that person for you people. And so, it is your duty to listen to me and to stage the play I decide on. *(To Dram)* You will write the kind of play I want you to write. *(To Dir)* You will direct it the way I--and he--tell you to. *(To YM, YW)* You have to act the way I and he tell you to. Is that clear? *(They nod)* Right then, I move that this decision has been unanimously adopted. *(Sits on the bed)* On to the next subject. *(Sits scribbling something)*

DRAM I will write...

DIR I will direct...

YM, YW We will act...

PROD *(Absorbed in writing)* What roles?

YM, YW *(Pointing to Dir)* Whatever roles he gives us.

DIR *(Pointing to Dram)* Whatever he writes.

DRAM *(To Prod)* Whatever you want me to.

PROD *(Still writing)* If I have to tell you what to write, why do you call yourself a dramatist?

DRAM (Laughing) But didn't you say it yourself...?

PROD *(Raising his head, in a bored tone)* Yes, I did. What choice did I have? You blokes can't choose a play even after hours of discussion.

DRAM *(Interrupting)* Did you ask me? *(Prod goes back to writing)* All of you know I'm the dramatist, but did one of you ask me--have you written a play? Will you write one?

PROD *(Looking down and writing)* Okay, I'll ask you. Have you written a play?

YM Will you write one?

DRAM I have written and I will write.

DIR Is it stageable?

DRAM *(Insulted)* Stageable? How dare you ask me that? It's the duty of the stage to suit my plays, not the other way round.

DIR Have you any idea how much stage techniques have changed?

DRAM The audience hasn't changed. It still wants to be entertained. Do you know that?

YM What Stanislavsky says about acting...

YW ...Does anyone but us know about it?

PROD *(Coming to the end of his writing)* Order, order. *(The four look at him in surprise. Finishes writing, gives the paper to YM and speaks to Dram and Dir)* You want to test me, do you? Look at this then, this is my sample. *(To YM)* Have you read it? *(YM nods smiling)* Show it to her. *(YM does, speaking with animated gestures. Prod sees Dram and Dir staring at him in astonishment)* What are you staring at? Put the two of you in a room for just two minutes and know what will happen. Only one will come out, licking his lips and patting his tummy. You guys are good for nothing but bickering. Which is why, I've done this myself. *(To YM, YW)* Come here--is my idea clear to you? *(They nod and come to center stage)*

DRAM *(To Prod)* What is it?

PROD A sample of a play.

DIR Which one?

PROD *Shakuntala. (Dram says 'Wah!', Dir makes a disgusted sound. To Dram)* Do you agree that Kalidasa is a dramatist? *(Dream nods)*

DIR No, I don't.

PROD Who asked you? If the Americans and the Russains say so, that's enough for me.

DIR Oh, that Kalidasa! *(Angrily)* Why didn't you say so before?

PROD There's no need. I know you're sure to follow the foreigners.

DIR *(Complaining)* But it's such an old drama...

PROD Have a look at my sample first. I'll title it the modern *Shakuntala*–after he *(pointing to Dram)* has completed it, that is.

DRAM After I have completed it?

PROD Of course. I have so much to do--I have to get the advance, print the tickets and handbills, go around giving complimentary passes. How am I going to find the time to write? Right, they will now act the Sutradhara and Nati's dialogue. And you have to write the rest of it in the same way. *(To YM, YW)* Hm, get going. For the moment, just speak the way I have suggested. Afterwards, he'll write it properly. *(To Dir)* And have a look at this direction. *(To the other two)* Imagine that the Nandistuti is over. *(Imitating the Dir's style)* One–two--three--go.

YM *(As Sutradhara, going to the edge of the stage and peering)* My love, are you free? If you've come out of the green room into the wings, can you come here--I mean on stage-for a moment?

YW *(As Nati)* I'm right here, darling. What do you want me to do?

YM *(Suddenly noticing her)* Oh, there you are! It's like this–tonight we have scholars and critics in the audience *(Coming closer, in*

her ears) They didn't want to come, they were forced to. *(Aloud)* We have to enact the modern *Shakuntala* for them. The cast should be ready. *(Whispers)* Dushyanta said he would come only if we gave him his taxi fare. Has he come?

YW Thanks to your good sense, everything is ready. *(Whispers)* I say, that was a smart move, sending a new sari to Shakuntala!

YM But, my love, I'm scared. Ask me why.

YW Sure I'll ask. Why?

YM My attempt can be called a success only if these scholars are satisfied. *(Whispers)* The idiots won't understand it anyway.

YW That's true... *(Whispers)* Your last words, I mean. *(Normal tone)* Now what do I have to do?

YM What else but entertain these people. *(Whispers to her)* That means, either sing or dance.

YW What season should my song be about? *(Whispers)* I'll use a film tune.

YM What other season but summer--summer which has just begun, summer which is fit to be enjoyed.

YW So be it. *(Sings in an ordinary tone)*

The taps have run dry.
But we're at ease.
No pots to fill
Such pleasures these.
Sahebs loll in A.C. rooms
Cattle wallow in a pool.
But for us poor *folk*,
Only our sweat can cool.
At last the shades of the evening fall.
And now it's the same finally for us all!

Translator's note : This is a very rough translation of the words in the original. These, or any other words set to a simple tune, can be sing.

YM Aha! Your song, so right for the occasion, has put everyone to sleep. Now, my dovie, what drama shall we perform?

YW What's this, my duckie? Didn't you say a modern *Shakuntala* yourself?

YM *(As if suddenly remembering)* Oh, yes, yes, I did, didn't I? But I was so lost in your music, I quite forgot about it. Just like Dushyanta when hunting.

YW What Dushyanta? What hunting?

YM Look, there he is, waiting. He knows it's almost college closing time. Now, look we shouldn't be here--specially not you.

Silence for a moment.

PROD So, Mr Director, would you call this at least modern?

DIR *(Goes to him and shakes his hands)* Congratulations, congratulations. I had no idea you had so much courage.

PROD *(As if insulted)* What! You thought this is borrowed *(looking at Dram)* from the green room?... *(As he speaks, he twirls his moustache and sees the others laughing. To Dram)* You will write like this, won't you?

DRAM *(Very serious)* I have no desire to spoil my name.

YW Don't worry about that. You can say--'translated by a modern Kalidasa'.

YM Yes, do that and I'll make sure to mention that in my Sutradhara lines.

DRAM I don't approve of such trash.

DIR God, this man and his pride!

PROD It's not pride, it's fear, fear. Ha ha.

DRAM *(Irritated)* I'm not scared, I'm disgusted, do you hear me, disgusted.

YM People who use words like disgust and shame can never write a modern play.

DRAM Shut up, you! What do you know, except learning your lines and spitting them out! You can't recognise a good play if you see one.

DIR What is a good play? Please enlighten us.

DRAM You! You're no different. All you want is novelty. Anything different. If the actors walked on their hands, you'd think it a good play.

DIR Production values are important, that's all we need.

DRAM To hell with your production values.

PROD *(To Dir)* What value did you say?

DRAM Value? It's no value at all. Production values--do you understand that? *(Prod shakes his head)* Naturally! It's meaningless. This man gets words from somewhere and repeats them like a parrot.

PROD You mean it's not there in Kannada dramas?

DIR Why not? If the director is good, you can see it in any drama.

DRAM *(Furious)* There you are! There you go again! A good director is enough, he says! You people don't value a dramatist at all.

DIR *(To Prod)* Shall I show you what this production value is in your own drama?

YM, YW Yes, please, do that. *(Both stand up)*

DIR *(Laughing)* I can act too, you know. I don't need your help.

YM *(To YW)* All directors imagine they can act.

YW *(To YM)* If they can act, why don't they do it themselves? Why do they chase us so desperately?

PROD *(To both of them)* Now, hold on, hold on. This is only a sample. You're the ones who'll do it on the day. *(To Dram)* Hey, you, watch this. It won't hurt you to just look. *(To Dir)* Okay go ahead, let's see what this value is.

DIR *(Taking everyone's silence for approval)* Look now. It's the same Shakuntala. In the fifth act of the play, they bring Shakuntala to Dushyanta. Dushyanta is here *(points to centre stage)*, sitting on his throne. Shakuntala is standing here *(shows edge of stage to left of spectators)* He looks at her. A beautiful young woman. They tell him she is his wife. He thinks to himself–I married such a beautiful young woman. They tell him she is his wife. He thinks to himself–I married such a beautiful woman and I can't remember it. But what he says aloud is--I never married her. Now, watch this. *(Takes a handkerchief out of his pocket)* Okay, this is Dushyanta--his lines begin.

Acts this by himself.

DUSHYANTA *(To himself)* What a beauty! And so young! Have I married her? Or have I not? I'm totally confused.

VOICE *(Dir acts this by moving back and covering his face with his kerchief)* Ha ha ha. *(Harsh laughter)*

DUS What did you say? I'm sorry, I was lost in thought. However hard I try, I can't remember having married her.

VOICE *(Going back and covering his face again)* You rogue! You're not trying to remember, no sir, no such thing. You're thinking of her beauty, you're drooling over it.

DUS For her present condition... *(breaks off and speaks as Dir)* She's pregnant. *(Goes back to acting)* How can I admit responsibility for her present condition and accept her?

VOICE *(As before)* You're a scoundrel. You're disappointed it isn't you who's made her pregnant. You're hoping to hold on to this bird that's hopped on to your hands. At the same time, you're scared that she's had an affair with another man.

DIR Please! Why do you criticize my character?

VOICE *(As before)* Your character! Ha! You talk of not looking at another man's wife, and then you stare as if you'd like to pierce her veil. Your character!

DUS *(To himself)* She's angry because I criticized women. Her anger makes her face glow. Aha!

VOICE Look at him. Licking his lips because she looks even more beautiful when she's angry. You're *(shouting)* despicable, low.

Dir wipes his face with his kerchief after this and goes back to earlier position. For a moment, no one speaks. Noticing Prod staring at him, Dir gives a silly laugh.

PROD *(To Dir)* You know, when you spoke, with your face covered--is that the value you spoke of?

All except Dir laugh.

DIR *(Ignoring laughter)* That was Dushyanta's inner self, his *antaratma.* I stood behind him to symbolize that he can't see it. And I covered my face to point out that no one else can see it, either.

PROD *(Still confused)* But why did it come to Dushyanta's palace and start abusing him?

DIR *(Explaining)* It didn't come from anywhere. It's inside Dushyanta, it's something that's inside all of us. Don't we hesitate when we're doing something wrong? It's the same *antaratma* that makes us hesitate. It knows all our secrets.

PROD *(With sudden comprehension)* Aha! Now I understand this value of yours. *(Dram laughs scornfully)* What is it? Why are you laughing now? You should be making the spectators laugh, not laughing yourself.

DRAM *(Controlling laughter)* Why shouldn't I laugh? We've been here hours and one speaks of values, another of modernity and a third of something else. Nobody seems to realize why we're here--there's absolutely no sense of responsibility. Why shouldn't I laugh?

PROD *(Irritated)* Go ahead and laugh. I'll join you myself, because here we are with a dramatist among us, yet we can't find a play to stage.

DRAM And why can't we? Now, listen to me. You went and fixed up this programme didn't you?

PROD *(Interrupting)* Yeah, and I had to shell out three thousand rupees for that.

DRAM *(Stopping him)* Oh, forget that, man. Now, tell me, did I offer to do your job? If we do our own jobs, there won't be a problem. Choosing a play should be left to the person who knows best. Instead, if every damn fool barges in and starts interfering, how will you find a play? Isn't this enough to make one laugh?

YM If that's so, why were we asked to be here to choose a play?

YW And if you ask me, a dramatist is bound to say his play is the best.

DIR If it's good, we may take it. Anyway, what do we want? A play to perform.

DRAM And what do you mean by that? Are you implying that my plays are not good enough?

PROD We still have to choose a play. How can it be either good or bad?

DRAM *(Unable to control his anger)* Choose your own play then. There's no place for me here. When there's so much bad feeling about my plays... *(bangs on the arms of his chair and begins to rise)*

PROD *(Preventing him from getting up, loudly)* Sit down, man. You were the only one left to threaten us with leaving. We've all had our turn...

YM *(Raising his hand)* Here, I haven't yet lost my temper and threatened a walk out.

All laugh. Atmosphere lightens.

PROD *(To Dram)* Right, Mr. Director, you've told us what kind of a play you want and so have I. Okay, I agree that this

is really the dramatist's job. So let him speak now and we'll agree to what he says.

DRAM *(Stubbornly)* I don't want any favours from you.

PROD *(Placating him)* Come on, man, you're older than all of us, you shouldn't sulk like this. Why did we all give our opinions? It was because you didn't speak. Now we're asking you to speak.

YM, YW Why don't you ask us?

PROD Okay, speak up. Our dramatist can think it over until then. *(To Dir)* Why are you laughing?

DIR *(Controlling laughter)* Choosing a drama itself has become a drama.

PROD That's all right. It may inspire our dramatist. *(To Dram)* Shall I order some more tea?

DRAM *(As before)* I don't want your bribes.

YM Yes, I think we should order it.

YW Otherwise, who knows, we may have to order dinner.

PROD *(To both)* I didn't ask you. I thought he *(indicating Dram)* needed inspiration and so ...

DRAM *(Angrily)* Didn't I say I don't want your tea?

PROD In that case, you sit and think. We'll hear these two in the meantime. *(To Dir)* Is that okay? *(He nods, lights a cigarette. To YM, YW)* Now, who's going to speak first?

YW We'll speak together.

YM And since we can't just say it...

YW ...we're going to act it out...

YM We'll tell you the story first, of course ...

YW We'll be showing you just two characters. That's enough for now.

YM But there are more characters in the play.

YW There's a kid of three.

YM *(To her)* Didn't I say we don't need the kid? And you'd agreed.

YW *(To him)* But I thought it over and decided we must have the kid.

YM *(To her)* I don't agree. We don't need that character.

YW *(To him)* If you don't have the kid, I don't want the play at all.

YM *(To her)* That's fine by me.

YW *(To him)* In any case, I hadn't really liked that play. But I thought the kid would liven it up.

YM *(Irritated)* Oh, damn your kid.

YW And damn your play.

They come out of it suddenly to the sound of the Dram's laughter. The other two join in the laughter.

PROD This is your drama, isn't it?

YM *(Muttering to her)* You're always spoiling things.

YW *(Same)* And why do you have to lose your temper?

Silence for a moment.

DRAM Go on, don't stop because I laughed. I was laughing at my own thoughts, anyway.

YM You think we care for your laughter?

YW And we haven't stopped.

PROD Come on here, then. Why are you two sitting there?

YM We're not puppets to dance when you pull the strings.

DIR *(To YW)* Why don't you begin? If you start, maybe he'll join in.

YM *(Interrupting)* I'm not her puppet, either.

DRAM Oh, never mind. You needn't act it, just tell us the story. I may use it if it's good.

PROD There! Didn't I say you would inspire him?

YW Our drama has no story.

DIR Wonderful! Then I'll direct it with great pleasure.

PROD No story? That means it's modern?

DIR If you tell me how it ends, I'll think of an impressive final curtain.

PROD *(Surprised)* Final curtain? But I thought you said you don't want a curtain at all!

DIR *(Scornfully)* Final curtain doesn't mean the curtain at the end. It's a technical term. It means the end should be impressive, powerful.

DRAM (To YM, YW) Go on, tell us. I'll make the story powerful, he'll make a powerful final curtain.

PROD I hope your drama has a hero, even if there's no story? (YM nods) Who's the hero?

YM My father.

PROD *(Stunned)* What!

DIR And who's the heroine?

YW My mother.

The other three, taken aback by this, are unable to respond and give each other meaningful looks.

PROD *(Hollow laugh)* Don't talk nonsense. Have some respect for your elders.

YW We're showing our respect for them by making them the hero and the heroine.

PROD What does that mean? What have they to do with ...

YW *(Interrupting)* When we say hero and heroine, we don't mean that they have the kind of a relationship you're imagining.

YM But that's not our fault. It's they who don't have the courage.

DIR *(With enthusiasm)* So it doesn't end with a wedding?

YW The story isn't over as yet. How do we know the end?

DRAM *(To both)* Look here, you two--if this is your idea of a joke, we'll let it go. But I don't think this kind of thing--bringing family matters on the stage--is good for our Sangh.

DIR Why don't we listen to it? If there are some production values...

DRAM *(Irritated)* You and your bloody production values! Give him a story with a man and a woman in it, and off he goes looking for production values!

PROD *(To Dir)* Do you know his father is a VIP? Do you know her mother is a social worker?

DRAM *(To Prod)* Isn't she the joint secretary of the International Women's Upliftment Association?

PROD *(Nodding)* His father just has to say the word, you know and he can get any position he wants. But he doesn't want anything.

At this, YM, YW jump up and begin to act, he as his father, she as her mother. This acting continues until they return to their original positions.

YM *(Getting up abruptly)* No, no, why all this honour for me? I only want to serve the people. *(Comes centre stage)*

YW *(Getting up as well)* No, no, the honour is ours, it's our Association which is honoured. The dust from your feet will sanctify our Sangh.

YM *(Laughing)* Such wonderful words, such wonderful words. *(Here he stops and stares at her. She acts embarrassment and covers herself, revealing her bust in the process. To himself)* Old tamarind, maybe, but it hasn't lost its tang. And she has a daughter who's ready for marriage! But look at her figure--still shapely.

YW *(Looking down, in a coquettish tone)* Why do you look at me that way?

YM *(Coming closer)* I was looking at your sari. Just see what beautiful stuff we get in our country now. *(Touches her shoulder while pretending to feel the sari).* Like butter. It suits your complexion.

YW *(To herself, still looking down)* Still a lecher in spite of his age! *(Moves away and speaks while rearranging her sari)* They don't make saris like this any longer. I'd gone to New York last month, I was representing our Sangh at the International Women's Seminar. The All India Sari Producers' Association made this specially for me. They wanted me to wear it in New York. They thought it would boost their sales abroad, you know. *(Looking at him)* People there loved me–I mean *(corrects herself)* my sari. *(Shyly, sari in mouth)*

YM Ha ha. Of course they'd love you--whatever you wear. *(She turns away bashfully)* It's the truth.

YW The Sangh should have chosen someone who'd show it off better.

YM *(Staring at her)* That's true. People may imagine your beauty comes from the sari, when the truth is, even if you didn't wear it...

YW *(Covering her face with her sari)* Chhi

YM *(Pretending to be scared)* What did I say? *(In sudden realization)* Ha ha. This is a sign of age, your thoughts rush to your tongue. Please forgive me.

YW *(Turns her face and looks at him)* Who would call you old? *(To herself)* They say his wife was so disgusted with him, she ran away. *(Aloud)* Your enthusiasm puts young people to shame.

YM *(Orating)* Young people! Young people! What use are they? They can't even feed themselves. *(To himself)* The way she talks I think the bird is easily caught. *(Aloud)* When I look at your work and enthusiasm, I sometimes think our women are much

better than the men. Now, if I had only found a companion like you in my younger days--I mean for public work...

YW *(Interrupting)* Your younger days? That's not so long back, is it? Honestly, we don't have even a bit of your energy. *(To herself)* He's like all men. Just spread your net and he falls in.

YM *(Hollow laugh)* Ha ha. Looks like you're going to flatter this old man into attending your function.

YW *(Coquettishly)* That's why I came myself. And I'd decided I wouldn't leave unless you agreed...

YM *(Interrupting)* You've come yourself,--ha ha--you've made me eager to accept your invitation. Ha ha *(To himself)* Whew! I'm not surprised her husband was scared of her and ran away. *(Staring, aloud)* To tell you the truth, I'm accepting your invitation only because you've come yourself. Ha ha *(Comes close as if revealing a secret and pats her cheek)* Ha ha ha. *(Moves away, seriously)* Forgive me, I patted your cheek instead of your back.

YW Your touch would inspire anyone. *(Holds his hand in both hers)*

YM *(To himself)* Her kid was just three when her husband left her. Now the girl is ready for marriage. But this one--she still flirts. *(Sighing, loudly)* Right them, what time should I be there?

YW Please come with your family.

YM *(Interrupting, with a sigh)* This old man has no one he can call his own. You know my only son quarrelled with me and left home.

YW *(Pretending pity)* All right, then, I'll come myself to escort you.

YM There you go, there you go. Troubling yourself again!

YW It's no trouble at all. What time shall I come?

YM *(As if thinking)* I wouldn't like to hurry you--or myself. So, why don't you come a little early--maybe half an hour or so?

YW All right.

Both turn away from each other, move back a step and then face each other again, he on the round table, she on his right. This is the meeting. They speak as if there is an audience before them.

YW *(To audience)* Our Chief Guest needs no introduction. But we are proud to speak of him. This day will truly be written in golden letters in the history of our Association. The man, whose mere presence thrills and inspires, is going to shower his immortal words on us today. Why does the whole country, why does our entire society honour him? Not just because he is a leader, but because he has that rare quality a leader should have. And that is character, good character. *(Stops speaking as if there is applause)* I speak on behalf of all the millions of Indian women whose real ornament is good character. *(Holding up her hand as if asking the applause to stop)* May I now request him to give us his words of advice?

She sits on the round table, he stands up.

YM *(Indicating with his folded hands that the applause has ceased when he stands up)* My heart is overflowing with the warmth of your welcome. Everyone knows I rarely go out for such functions. But here I am. *(Again the suggestion of applause from an unseen audience)* This is because of your President. *(Hand on her shoulder suggestively)* She has praised me greatly; indeed, her praise is like a crown of thorns on my head. But I know that this same crown would adorn her and your Association. The thought makes me glad. What more can I say?

Sits down with folded hands. She acts as if garlanding him. The meeting is dispersing. Both take a step to indicate that they are leaving. YM looks around, seems satisfied they are alone, takes off his garland and puts it round her neck. She stands with bowed head. He pats her shoulder, raises her chin with his right hand, says as if whispering. 'Will you escort the Chief Guest home?' She nods, head still bent. They quickly move apart and with harried steps go back to their former positions and sit supporting their heads with their hands.

A moment's silence during which all of them avoid looking at one another.

DRAM *(Trying to change the atmosphere)* Well, our Sangh is certainly going to have a new young dramatist very soon.

PROD *(Not understanding)* What?

DRAM You need imagination to write a play. *(To Dir)* And these two have a powerful imagination. Didn't you notice? *(Signals with his eyes).*

DIR *(Understanding the signal)* I knew it when I saw their acting talent. *(To Prod)* Make him write our next drama and I'll direct it--yes, I will, with great enthusiasm and all my energy.

DRAM *(Looking at YM)* He's going to make a name as a dramatist--that's for sure.

PROD Well, that takes care of the next drama. *(To Dram)* But you have to write this one. You will, won't you?

DIR *(To Dram)* Why don't you write it on the lines of a Greek tragedy?

DRAM *(Applauding)* Wonderful! Wonderful! Actually, I had the same thought myself.

PROD *(Looking at both)* What does 'like a Greek tragedy' mean?

DRAM *(Enthusiastically)* It means a good man, a worthy man, suffers because of some event in the past that he knew nothing about.

DIR The main point of it is that there's the hero on one side and Destiny on the other--the conflict between the two.

DRAM He's not scared of Fate, and so it's an equal battle. You know the saying--*'daivam nihatya kuru pourusham atmashaktya'*: he's that kind of a brave man.

PROD If he's such a hero, how does it become a tragedy?

DIR Because ultimately he's defeated.

PROD So? Everyone knows that no one can defeat Fate.

DRAM The tragedy is not his defeat--the tragic effect comes from our knowing he's a good man.

PROD *(In sudden understanding)* Some dramatist you are! What's strange about good men or honest men not succeeding? Where's the tragedy in something so common?

DIR You don't understand.

PROD Explain it to me then. Isn't that your job--yours and his?

DRAM *(As if explaining)* All right. Briefly--the seeds of tragedy lie in the downfall of the great.

YM *(Suddenly)* No!

YW *(Looking up)* No! We say no!

The other three look in surprise.

PROD Do you know what we're talking about?

DRAM What is that 'no' for?

YM Tragedy is not the downfall of the great.

DIR *(Laughing)* What does that mean?

YW *(Angry tone)* The real tragedy is raising small people to great heights.

Shows the difference between small and heights with her hands

YM That's the tragedy of our country.

YW The tragedy of the world today.

YM *(Getting up, to Dram)* You must write about this.

YW *(Also getting up)* Make the mother the heroine.

PROD *(Frightened)* Your mother?

YM *(Goes to round table, puts arms on it and standing before audience turns his face towards Dram)* Make the father the hero.

PROD *(As above)* Whose father?

YW *(Coming to round table, banging on it)* Father! Mother! Does it matter whose? They're all the same.

YM *(Banging as well)* Listen to us, listen to what we're telling you--this is what you have to write.

YW We refuse to be known as anyone's children.

PROD *(Trying to change the subject)* Actually, we're all the children of Bharat Mata.

YM *(Angry tone)* She's conceived us from leaders like my father.

YW *(Artificial laugh)* We have as many fathers as there are leaders.

YM *(Disgusted laugh)* But only one mother. Ha ha ha.

YW *(To Dram)* Come on, write this tragedy.

YM *(To Dir)* And you--yes you have to direct it--with all your energy and enthusiasm.

Saying this, he runs to him as if inviting him.

YW *(To Dram)* What are you waiting for? Write. *(Gives him her pen)* Take this. *(Goes to her bag and takes some papers out of it)* And here's paper. Now, go on--*(makes him sit in the chair, puts the round table before him)*

YM *(To Prod)* And what are you waiting for? Start your publicity, get the audience. Go on.

PROD *(Laughing)* Why are you yelling at me, man, what wrong have I done?

YW We've all done wrong. I, you, he, he *(pointing to the others)* everyone *(pointing towards audience)*

DRAM What wrong? I haven't written anything as yet.

DIR And I haven't had a chance to direct. How can I do anything wrong?

PROD I spent my own money because I didn't want you blokes to be disappointed. Is that wrong?

YM No, no that. A greater wrong...

THE OTHER THREE What wrong?

YW An enormous wrong. A tragedy. A sin.

OTHER THREE *(To her)* Why don't you tell us what that wrong is?

YM It's the sin we're all committing, the sin we go on committing...

OTHER THREE *(Persistent)*... that? That's what you want to know, don't you? I'll tell you. It's the sin of conferring greatness on unworthy people, of applauding them...

YM That's the tragedy of the world. We know they're unworthy, but still we hold them up to be great.

YW We--you--they--all of us have committed this sin.

DRAM *(Suddenly getting up)* I've got it, I've got it. I've found a title for the drama.

DIR, PROD What is it?

DRAM Forgive Us Our Sins. Forgive us, Purandara Vitthala, forgive us our sins.

Begins turning around while still standing in the same position, hands patting cheeks. At first YM, YW say 'hear hear' and clap in rhythm. Then all four of them, clapping in rhythm like a bhajan group, begin to go round the dramatist.

The End

Notes on Translators

Ramachandra Sharma was born in 1925 in Bangalore. A trained teacher, he left India in 1958 to teach in Ethiopia and England. He obtained his Ph.D. Degree in Psychology from the University of London. Having worked as a psychologist in England, Zambia and with UNESCO, he returned to India in 1982 and settled down in Bangalore.

A pioneer of modernism in Kannada, Sharma has received the central and Karnataka Shaitya Akademi awards and the Rajyotsava Prashasti from the Government of Karnataka for his writing. He has translated one hundred English poems of the twentieth century into Kannada. He has edited a collection of modern Kannada short stories, *From Cauvery to Godavari*, for Penguin Books India. Katha has brought out a volume of his Kannada stories in English translation under the title *Home And Away*.

G.S.Amur lives in Dharwad after his retirement from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University where he was Professor of English. from 1968 to 1985. He writes criticism both in Kannada and English and has won several awards including the Sahitya Akademi award, Bharatiya Bhasha Prashasti and the Karnataka State Rajyotsava award. His publications in English include *The Concept of Comedy*, *Adya Rangacarya* and *Essays on Modern Kannada Literature*. His best known works in Kannada are *Bhuvanada Bhagya* and *Viratapurusha*. He has edited a number of books in English and Kannada which include *Modern Kannada Short Stories*, published by Sahitya Akademi and *Bendre Kavya* brought out by Karnataka Sahitya Akademi.

Padma Ramachandra Sharma has a master's degree in English Literature and has taught in India, Ethiopia, England, Zambia and Malavi at various levels. She has received the Katha and Sahitya Akademi awards for her translations. Kuvempu's classic *Kanuru Heggaditi*, Kambar's folk narra-

tives and Vaidehi's stories figure prominently among her English translations. She has collaborated with Ramachandra Sharma, her husband, in translating stories by Masti Venkatesa Iyengar and Yashwant Chittal into English for Penguin Books.

K.Raghavendra Rao has a doctoral degree from Toronto University. He has taught political science at Guvahati, Karnataka and Mangalore Universities. He has worked extensively in translation of both poetry and prose from Kannada into English, including the novels *Parva* and *Vamshavriksha* by S.L. Bhyrappa and poems by Channaveera Kanavi and D.R. Bendre. He is one of the pioneers of modern Indian poetry in English and has edited with P. Lal *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry.* In addition to his books on political theory, he has published *The Road Taken*, a collection of his original poems in English. Professor Rao presided over the annual session of the Indian Academy of Social Sciences held in Santiniketan in 1994 and has been honoured by the Academy by the Professor Sukhatme Gold Medal for his contribution to Indian social sciences.

Usha Desai A paediatrician by profession and a former head of the Medical Division of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, is Adya Rangacharya's elder daughter. She is now busily engaged in translating Adya's work and has already completed English versions of seven of his plays, two of which figure in this anthology.

Shashi Deshpande Is a novelist and short story writer. She has nine short story collections, six novels and two short crime novels to her credit. Her books have been published both in India and abroad. Three of her novels, *Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* have received awards, including the Sahitya Akademi award for *That Long Silence.* Her novels and short stories have been translated into a number of Indian languages as well as

many European ones. Her last novel, *Moving On*, came out in April 2004.

Apart from fiction, she has written a number of articles on literature, language, on Indian writing in English, on feminism and women's writing, which have appeared in many national Indian newspapers and magazines. A collection of her essays *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, which came out of these articles and lectures given both in India and abroad, has just been published.

Shashi Deshpande has also written four books for children, as well as the script for a prize-winning Hindi feature film *'Drishti'*. Her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was made into a movie recently.

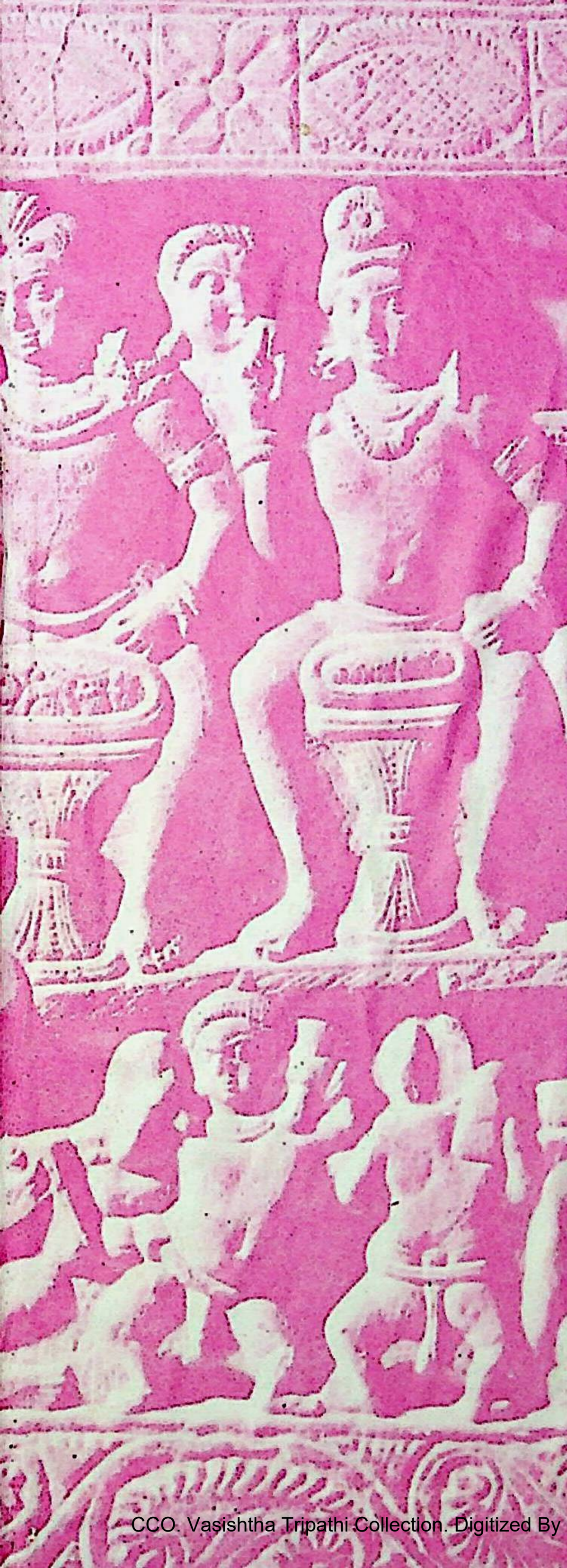
She is the daughter of Adya Rangacharya and Sharada Adya and is married to Dr. D.H. Deshpande. They have two sons and live in Bangalore.











G.S.Amur (b.1925-) is a distinguished critic and formerly Professor of English of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathawada University, Aurangabad. He writes criticism both in Kannada and English and has won several awards including Sahitya Akademi Award in 1996. His important publications in English are *The Concept of Comedy, Adya Rangacharya* and *Essays on Modern Kannada Literature*. His *Bhuvanada Bhagya* which won the Akademi award has been considered as one of the very important works in Kannada criticism. He has edited several books in English and Kannada and written scholarly introductions to English translations of some important Kannada classics. Sahitya Akademi has published his monographs on A.N. Krishna Rao, Bendre, Shanthinatha Desai and 'Selected Kann ada Short Stories' edited by him.

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